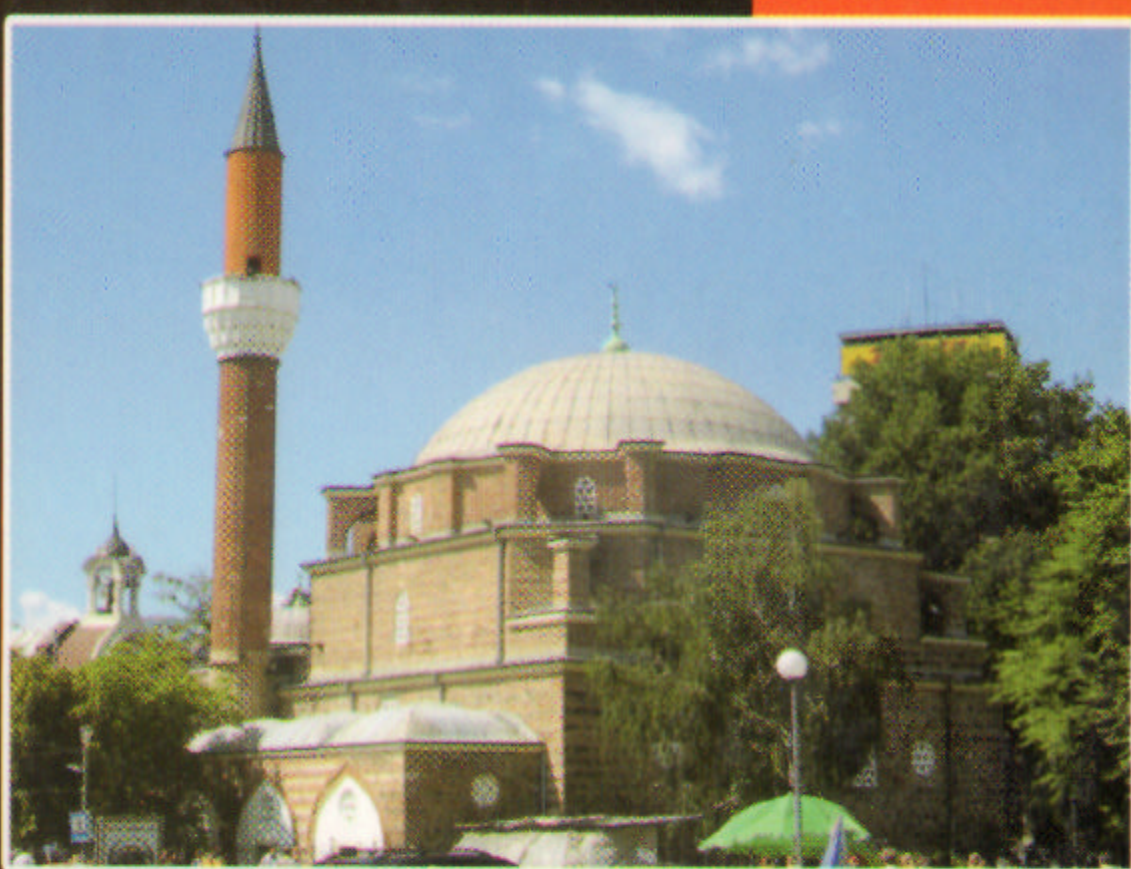


Galin Jordanov

GLIMPSES OF THE HISTORY OF BULGARIA



A foreword by Andrey Pantev
with over 100 colour illustrations and a multimedia CD included

Vesny
publishing house

★ NOVA ZVEZDA ★

Galin Jordanov

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**with a foreword by Andrey Pantev
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★NOVA ZVEZDA★

Sofia, 2005

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GLIMPSES OF THE HISTORY OF BULGARIA

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A FOREWORD BY ANDREY PANTEV, PROFESSOR OF HISTORY

In times of significant political changes historical writings shoot up like mushrooms. One of the reasons for this is the rule that they all begin with a revision of the past. They conform to not only because of certain necessities but also because every generation is digging into the past in search of answers to questions that stand before it today. In this particular way are being brought back themes and events which simply have not been that actual before. So, read this book. It is worth the effort. You will come upon things in it which you thought you already knew. You might not share the opinion of what has been laid out here; you might find the events and their explanation well-known or queer – anyway, it is worth reading it.

However, there is one more thing. It is been for more than a century that the Bulgarians point out their cultural and historical heritage, along with their tradition of state, as a basic argument for their communion to the European world. Their “awakening” itself as a modern national community is caused by the idea of reproduction of their historical prestige. While writing history the ideologists and functionaries of the Bulgarian national liberation movement believed that they were writing the future. Without being an exception in the history of Eastern and Central Europe this cult towards the historical past strengthened but, on the other hand, sometimes it even limited their significance in the European civilization. It included various dimensions which often seemed contradictory. Our own notion of ourselves coincided quite rarely with the notion that the others had of us. And this lack of correspondence frequently provoked a justified reaction whose painful sensations lead to groundless exaggerations. In fact, our real value between the two extremes – that of claims and the other, of real merits – laid somewhere in the middle...

A yet too rare example of a balanced approach towards the Bulgarian past is what you will come upon in this book. There are no overstated exploits here but also there is no nihilistic self-denial. There are no complaints and threats towards what the others have done to us here but also there is no slavishness before them. There are no claims for monopolistic historical priorities here but also there is no underestimation of the contributions of the Bulgarian factor in the cultural and political foundations of Christian Europe. In this book you will get a glimpse of Bulgaria as build in and fit into the whole historical process on the continent – in which there are impetuous upsurges and continuous falls. That is, its real value! Here is a testimony that not only professional historians can write valuable history...

Andrey Pantev



In the heart of Sofia rise the remains of Roman public baths from the 2nd and 3rd c. A. D., turned later (c. 4th c.) into the Church of St George.

INAUGURAL WORDS BY THE AUTHOR

Herodotus was the father of history. Well, but in the V c. B. C. his task was easier as he had at disposal mainly materials on the Persian Wars. It is curious, would he be able to prove his fatherhood genetically if he got in our days when almost half of the literary heritage of mankind is connected more or less with history – from the most serious scientific works to queer improvisations or “disclosures” offered by low-grade novelists...

Historical writings that allude to the fate of even a single country constitute of piles of volumes today. But when it is spoken of a country like Bulgaria whose embryo is lost far behind in the millennia, and the aim of the author is to depict the historical course of events in just superficial strokes, then the task gets rather more complex. This one wrote in one way, the other belies to him, a third one refutes the rest... Having at disposal but a page or two for a whole century that is stuffed with events, one gets confused. And starts applying the method of rejecting: from here we take just the most substantial facts, from there just the most outstanding persons, and so on. Of course, personal attitude also says its say. The formulation of one historical author is being preferred to the one of another, the interpretation of a Renaissance architect sounds to you more decent than the one of an eminent contemporary. We can not speak of any impartiality.

The aim of this booklet is simple: one who has no time to read vast works can, by these few dozens of pages, get in touch with the most important events that took place during the past two millennia on the territory south of the river Danube and west of the Black Sea – the land that bears the name Bulgaria...

Galin Jordanov

**A land like a human palm...
A bigger land I don't require.
I'm glad your mountains are flint-hard
And that your blood has Southern fire.**

Taken from Georgi Djagarov's "Bulgaria",
translated by Peter Tempest



A reconstructed ancient fortress in Nessebar.

CHAPTER 1

FROM PREHISTORIC TIMES TO THE FORMING OF A NATION

Thracians, Greeks and Romans

Archaeological excavations had shown in an indisputable way the existence of primitive man earlier than hundreds of thousands of years in the lands inhabited today by Bulgarians. Impressing collections of flint, bone and horn tools as well as earthenware and ceramics used during the Copper-



A Thracian tomb in South-Eastern Bulgaria.

and-Stone Age can be seen in most Bulgarian museums. Works of idol plastic arts reveal the diverse and unique spiritual life that took place in these lands.

However, the earliest inhabitants of the Bulgarian lands were recognized to be the Thracians – mentioned by Herodotus as “one of the most multitudinous peoples” of the Ancient world and referred to as the “horse bridlers” in Homer’s *Iliad*. Five thousand years ago numerous tribes of them inhabited not only the Balkan Peninsula – south of the Danube, along the river Maritza and the south-western parts of present-

day Bulgaria – but also Asia Minor and some of the islands in the Aegean Sea. Thracians were of Indo-European origin and certainly represent the ethnical basis that served later as one of the genetic ingredients for the forming of the Bulgarian nation.

They were acquainted with the ways of producing iron tools and dealt well with farming or animal breeding. Thracian kings minted coins and had at their disposal skilled goldsmiths for which testimonies are the famous Thracian silver and golden treasures – such as the Rogozen or the Panagyurishte treasures – found in our lands and exposed in many countries of the world. But along with that some ancient historians admit that part of their tribes have shown themselves as good sailors who rivalled in experience the rulers of the marine expanse, the Greeks, and sometimes acted even like pirates... Thracian culture of that period was strongly influenced by the



The old Roman city of Nicopolis ad Nestum (near today’s Gotse Delchev in SW Bulgaria) was founded by Emperor Trajan in 106.



The monument of Macedonian king Philip II in the city of Plovdiv which in ancient times was named after him, Philipopolis.

Greek colonization of the Black Sea coastline after the 7th century B. C. as the multiple settlers of the Greek city-states established economic and cultural exchange with the Thracian lands. So was initiated the processes of Hellenization of a part of the Thracian ethnos and the mighty Greek civilization this way enriched the Thracian culture. Thracian religion took notions from the Greek divinities and, on their part, the Greeks paid tribute to the legendary Thracian singer and musician Orpheus, who had an important position in Thracian mythology.

Thracian kingdoms waged wars against the Persians and Hellas for centuries. But the powerful Macedonian state of Philip II managed to crash them. It was his son, Alexander the Great, who quickly appreciated the military virtues of the Thracians and let them join the multilingual Macedonian army. After his death in 323 B. C. the Thracian king Seuth III succeeded to restore partially the former state and so the walls of the new capital city of Seuthopolis rose close to the location of present-day Bulgarian town of Kazanluk.

During the 3rd century B. C. the Romans managed to conquer the ancient Thracian lands. Later, in 74 B. C., a slave of Thracian origin who 'graduated' a gladiator school and became famous under the name of Spartacus headed the most continuous and mass insurrection in ancient Rome. That was the period of the so called Romanization of the Thracian world which continued until the 4th century A. D. when "The Great Migration of Peoples" began and the Thracians had to keep Celts, Huns, Goths, Avars and other barbarian tribes from invading their lands. In these circumstances the Thracians – partially Hellenized and Romanized, and having their rich and complex cultural heritage – had to stand before one of the most significant historical events for them: the disintegration of the Roman Empire in 395. In less than a century its western half was put to a collapse under the ravaging barbarian tribes from the north but the eastern part survived under the name of Byzantium with Constantinople as a capital city. Those were the days when the founders of the First Bulgarian Kingdom stepped onto their future land...



The Roman amphitheatre in Plovdiv.

Slavs and Proto-Bulgarians

During the 4th to 7th centuries the Slavs were the most multitudinous peoples in Europe. They belonged to the Indo-European linguistic family and historians classify them usually in three main divisions: West Slavs include Poles, Czechs, Slovaks and the Wends who lived in Germany east of the river Elbe; East Slavs include Great Russians, Little Russians (Ukrainians) and White Russians (Belorussians); South Slavs include Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians and Bulgarians. Originally the Slavs inhabited the lands to the north of the Carpathian Mountains but by the beginning of the

6th century Slavic tribes undertook marches to the south and crossed the Danube to loot in the territory of the Byzantine Empire. At that time a tribe of Tatar nomads, the Avars, established a kingdom (407–653) in central Asia. In 558 they crossed the Urals and settled in Dacia after which started threatening the western countries and, of course, Constantinople. The Avars forced some of the Slavic tribes to settle permanently in various regions of the Balkan Peninsula. So were differentiated the “Bulgarian group” – which stayed in Moesia, Thrace and Macedonia – and the Serbo-Croatian group which gradu-

ally withdrew to the western half of the peninsula.

The Byzantine Empire was not able to hold back the Slavs neither by applying military force, nor by diplomatic means, much less by attracting select representatives of theirs to the army or to the administration. The local Thracian population gradually got assimilated in the immense Slavic mass. However, in their struggle against the powerful Byzantine Empire the Slavs stood in constant need of an ally. And in the second half of the 7th century the desired ally appeared: the Proto-Bulgarians came from the north...



The ruins in Nessebar (ancient Messembria). Numerous other relics from the distant past can be seen along the Bulgarian Black Sea coast.



The Roman town Nicopolis ad Istrum was built by the Emperor Trajan in 107 to commemorate his victory over the Dacians with whom he fought for almost seven years...

Originally Turkic-speaking tribes from the steppes of Central Asia or, according to other authors, from the Altaic ethnic community of Western Siberia, the Proto-Bulgarians became part of the general wave of the Hun incursion and resettled in the lands between the Caspian Sea and the Sea of Azov to the north of Caucasus. The name "Bulgarians" was used for the first time by a Roman historian in 354. Moving west with the Huns the Proto-Bulgarians finally reached the Byzantine provinces on the Balkans. To protect his capital in the beginning of the 6th century the Byzantine emperor ordered the construction of a wall between the Black Sea and the Sea of Marmora. Facing this new enemy Constantinople took steps in disuniting and opposing to each other the Proto-Bulgarian tribes and finally they submitted to the Avar khaganate. Some tribes dispersed in Central Europe and Northern Italy, others stayed in the steppes by the Sea of Azov. In 632 the Proto-Bulgarian khan Kubrat succeeded to overthrow the power of the khaganate and to create a powerful military and tribal union which was defined by the Byzantine historians as "Old Great Bulgaria". An alumnus of Constantinople himself khan

Kubrat led a very wise policy with the Empire and was honoured with a rank of a patrician from the emperor. He established as a capital of his state the ancient city of Fanagoria on the Taman Peninsula and this state lasted for about three decades. However, his five sons could not cope with the intertribal dissensions and soon after their father's death the powerful Khazar Khaganate subjugated the tribes. The elder son, Batbayan, stayed as head of the so called "black Bulgarians" under Khazar dominion. The second son, Kotrag, led his people to the middle reaches of the river Volga to found a state called the "Volga-and-Kama Bulgaria". The fourth son, Kuber, made for Panonia and finally settled down in Macedonia. And the fifth son, Altzek, after taking a long march stopped in Italy. Kubrat's third son – Asparuh, led his father's tribe across the river Dnepr to settle in a naturally fortified area called Ongal among the rivers Danube, Prut and Dnestr. Soon the Proto-Bulgarians came into union with the Slavs who had already settled in the lands south of the Danube and together they recognized the Byzantine Empire as a common enemy. Out of this union was born the First Bulgarian Kingdom...



Khan Asparuh, the founder of the First Bulgarian Kingdom, as envisaged by the artist Tekla Alexieva.



A ritual vessel from the time of the First Bulgarian Kingdom.

In the foundations of the new state lied elements of the social organization and the spiritual traditions of both Slavs and Proto-Bulgarians. Major position in the economic life of the Proto-Bulgarians occupied animal breeding, and in particular horse husbandry. All pastures and herds were common but unlike the situation in Slavic society, slavery was rather wide-spread among the Proto-Bulgarians. Besides with hunting and fishing, the tribes were familiar with the potter's wheel, the art of jewellery, hide processing, carpentry and the blacksmith's craft. The basis of further social and cultural development was provided by the monotheistic religion – with Tangra, the Supreme God of Heaven – combined with many different beliefs and cults. A sign of some advance in that culture was also the Proto-Bulgarian calendar system based on a twelve-year lunar zodiac cycle.



A map of the lands on which the first Proto-Bulgarian horde had settled.

So in the second half of the 7th century before the Slavs and the Proto-Bulgarians stood the great historical task of establishing a new state under the name of Bulgaria...

**THOUGH HE LIVE WELL MAN
DIES AND ANOTHER IS BORN, SO
MAY THE LAST BORN GAZING ON
THIS REMEMBER HIM WHO MADE
IT...**

Khan Omurtag's inscription from the first
half of the 9th c.



*A huge concrete monster rises in North-Eastern Bulgaria in memory of the 1 300 anniversary of
the First Bulgarian Kingdom...*

CHAPTER 2

THE FIRST BULGARIAN KINGDOM: 681–1018

First steps

When in 680 the Byzantine Emperor Constantine IV Pogonate set out on a long march by both land and sea against the horde of Khan Asparuh, which had settled at the Ongle, he was probably not expecting the forthcoming utter defeat. But the danger of being subjugated by Byzantium made Slavs and Proto-Bulgarians join their efforts. Asparuh made an alliance with the neighbouring Slavic tribes and in an area close to the old Greek city of Odessos (or today's Varna) was born the First Bulgarian Kingdom.

At that time – along with the Byzantines at the passes in the Eastern Balkan Range – the Avars were a real danger from the west and the Hazars were pressing from the south-east...



Pliska was the capital city of the First Bulgarian Kingdom, founded by khan Asparouh in 681.

After several successful raids of Khan Asparuh's horsemen in Thrace Emperor Constantine finally made a peace treaty with him in 681 and this year is regarded as inceptive for the First Bulgarian Kingdom. This was the first Slavic state formation, the first medieval state in Central and Eastern Europe and, of course, one of the oldest states in Europe ever. Even though they were fewer in

number and later on they were assimilated by the vast Slavic mass, the Proto-Bulgarians actually played a rather significant role in the new state for a long time – occupying most of the leading military and administrative positions. As a first capital city of the new state was chosen a place in the north-eastern part of today's Bulgaria and named Pliska.

Asparuh met his death in a battle with the Hazars in 700 and his son Tervel (700–718) took over. He succeeded to gain recognition from Byzantium and made the first territorial expansion of his state to the south-east. Some years later the Bulgarian army put Constantinople under siege. But then had to drive back the Arabs who were also attacking the Byzantine capital and that is considered to be the first defeat of Arabian forces on European land...

Khan Tervel's death brought a political crisis in the state that lasted for some decades. It was Telerig (768–777) who succeeded in



The reconstructed foundations of Khan Krum's palace.

achieving some stability. But then the turmoil was ultimately done away with by Khan Kardam (777–802) who defeated the Byzantine army, signed a peace treaty with Constantine VI and added the south-western lands along the river Struma to his state.



The horseman of Madara was carved from the rock at a height of 80 feet. Still we have no answer: is this a Thracian warrior or the figure of a Bulgarian ruler from the 8th c.?

25th of July 811 they defeated the Byzantines. Nicephorus I himself was killed and the Khan – following an old pagan tradition – plated the emperor's skull in silver and drank wine from it. As the next peace proposals were rejected again the Bulgarians seized Philipopolis (Plovdiv) and undertook a victorious march to the south. In 813 their cavalry reached the walls of Constantinople. A siege of the Byzantine capital went in preparation, so the new emperor Leo V sent for help from Charlemagne, the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. But in the spring of 814 Khan Krum died of a heart attack.

Krum's successor, Khan Omurtag (814–831), concluded a 30-years peace treaty with Byzantium. Then he expanded the territory of the state to the north-east and north-west defeating the Hazars and the Emperor Louis II. Omurtag reconstructed the capital Pliska, enlarged it and ordered the building of several new fortresses. His son Malamir (831–836) and his grandson Presiyan (836–852), after subjugating some more Slavic tribes, added territories in the south-western part of the Peninsula – the Rhodopes, Aegean Thrace and South Macedonia – to the Bulgarian state. So in the mid 9th century Bulgaria established itself as the third political power in Europe – after Byzantium and the Holy Roman Empire...

Transition to Christianity and the Cyrillic alphabet

By the middle of the 9th century Christianity was already wide-spread in the old continent. The Roman Curia and the Constantinople Patriarchate – representing Catholicism and Orthodoxy – were running a struggle for influence in the European South-East. Realising that the imposition of Christianity as an official religion will help to be surmounted the linguistic, cultural and religious differences between Slavs and Proto-Bulgarians Presiyan's son Khan Boris I (852–889) made steps in that direction. In 853 Bulgaria – in alliance with France and Great Moravia – fought against the German King-

In the beginning of the 9th century ahead of the Bulgarians stood a great statesman – Khan Krum (803–814) who expanded his kingdom to the north, reaching the Carpathian Mountains. Meanwhile, the Byzantine Emperor Nicephorus I launched an attack against him. In 809 Krum seized the Byzantine fortified citadel of Serdika (Sofia) and made peace proposals to the emperor. Nicephorus turned them down, attacked the capital Pliska with his big army, reduced it to ashes and looted it, then headed back home with the spoils. But the Bulgarians laid an ambush in a mountain pass and on the



Boris I was the first Bulgarian Khan converted to Christianity.

dom and Croatia. Ten years later – this time in alliance with the Germans – the Bulgarians were fighting Great Moravia. But Byzantium took side in favour of the latter and its army invaded Bulgaria. The defeat forced Boris I to break the promise he had made to the German king to adopt Christianity from the Roman Church and after signing in 863 a peace treaty with the Byzantine Emperor Michail III he was compelled to receive the Christian religion from the Church in Constantinople.

In 864 the Khan was converted to Christianity and assumed the title Prince as the Emperor became his godfather. But it had to be done secretly to avoid the reaction of the pagan aristocracy. However, a mass rebellion followed and Boris had to suppress the resistance by slaughtering a considerable part of his nobles along with all their clans. A Byzantine ecclesiastical mission was settled in Bulgaria and it ordained the first archbishop of the newly converted Bulgarian people – Josef. In 865 Christianity was declared the state religion.

By the same time in an aristocratic family in Thessaloniki were born two brothers: Cyril and Methodius. The elder one, Methodius, became governor of a Slavic region, while Cyril chose the fate of a scholar and after graduating the famous Magnaur School in Constantinople under the name Constantine the Philosopher he was appointed as court librarian. In fact, Cyril was his adopted byname when he became a bishop. Later the brothers received an assignment from the Byzantine emperor for which they joined and retired to a monastery. The task of the assignment was fulfilled: in 855 they came out with a new product – the Glagolitic alphabet. Then the brothers – with the aid of several disciples of theirs – started translating books from Greek into Slavonic for the will of Constantinople was the quicker and easier dissemination of Christianity among the pagan Slavic tribes.



The monument of the 'Salonica brothers' Cyril and Methodius in front of the National Library in Sofia which is named after them.

In 860 on the request of the Prince of Great Moravia Cyril and Methodius were sent there as official Byzantine missionaries in order to build a line of defence against the German cultural and religious expansion. There they founded Slavic schools and a local church, taught their disciples the new alphabet and developed the new Slavic script adding some works of their own. Till that time, as the canons ordained, Christianity was to be practiced only in the three "holy languages": Greek, Latin and Hebrew. So Cyril – as a result of slanderous reports on the part of the German clergy – was summoned to Rome to stand before the Pope and answer for his deeds. In 869 he defended the right of the Slavs to have their own language in which the divine services to be hold. Unfortunately, soon he died. Impressed by the brilliant dispute of the brothers with the Roman clergy Pope Adrian II ordained Methodius as bishop of the Slavic province Panonia. Until his death in 885 he devoted himself to significant educational and religious activities. But then the German clergy stroke again and the disciples of the two brothers were subjected to pursuit. In 886 some of them – Clement, Naum and Angelari – arrived in Bulgaria and were accepted cordially by Boris I in Pliska.

Then three schools were set up and soon hundreds of enlightened Bulgarians came out of them. Having the ruler Boris I behind his back Clement built a monastery in Ohrid, Macedonia,



Relics from Veliki (Great) Preslav, the second capital city of the Kingdom established by Boris I in 893.

improved the Glagolitic alphabet and named it after his teacher Cyril – Cyrillic alphabet. For those merits Clement of Ohrid received high recognition and even today the University of Sofia bears his name. The other disciple of Cyril, Naum, led the second centre of enlightenment in the capital Pliska which was focused mainly on literary activities. There were laid the foundations of a literature which could be compared to the Byzantine and in that initiative took part the son of Boris I, Simeon, to whom Fate had allotted a great future...

After the death of Naum in 910 both disciples were canonized as Bulgarian saints. These men had a substantial contribution to the spiritual, cultural and intellectual development of the First Bulgarian Kingdom, to the raising of Bulgaria as a spiritual leader of the Slav community and to the cultural advance of Medieval Europe as a whole. Under the influence of Christianity and the Slavic script by the end of the 9th century the Bulgarian nation was ultimately formed and the Bulgarian state was consolidated.

The “Golden Age” of King Simeon the Great

After Prince Boris I retired on his own will to a monastery in 889 his first-born son Vladimir sat on the throne. Soon it came clear that the new ruler had a different vision for the religious and cultural future of the country: he wanted to restore paganism and did not hesitate to reaccept his pagan name Rassate. At hearing about this Boris left the monastery, dethroned his son and blinded him, then handed the crown to his second son, Simeon (893–917). Meanwhile, in 893 he shifted the capital city from Pliska some forty kilometres to the south-west and established Veliki (Great) Preslav which remained as a capital city until 972.

Simeon spent his early years in Constantinople, graduated the famous Magnaur School with honour and returning to Bulgaria he devoted himself to literary activities. In his father's plans he was to stand ahead of the Bulgarian church. However, his brother's betrayal of the Christian cause put him on the throne and in time this turned out to be a successful move. Knowing well the Byzantines Simeon set before himself a major goal: to crash the Empire and acquire the rights of its Emperor! But first he decided



King Simeon the Great as envisaged by the artist Dimitar Gyudjenov.

to expand the territory of his state and to consolidate its people. In 894 the Byzantine emperor ordered the market-place for Bulgarian goods to be moved from Constantinople to Thessaloniki – which was quite a disadvantage for the Bulgarian traders – and that served Simeon as a motive for military actions against Byzantium. In response the Emperor instigated the Magyars to attack Bulgaria from the north. But Simeon called the tribes of the Pechenegs for help and they drove back the aggressor, while the Bulgarian army crossed Eastern Thrace and reached Constantinople. So in 904 was signed a peace treaty: the Emperor recognized the new borders of Bulgaria which included Macedonia and Albania. Thus ended the first decade of Simeon's rule; to begin another period of wars against Byzantium...



Reconstructed remains of the fortified hill above the town of Shumen.

After the siege of Constantinople in 913 the Emperor was compelled to acknowledge him the title “King of the Bulgarians” and Simeon was escorted with honours. But a year later the peace treaty was cancelled. So the Bulgarian troops invaded again some Byzantine northern territories and, sensing the danger, the Emperor built an anti-Bulgarian coalition of Serbs, Magyars and Pechenegs, then sent troops against Bulgaria by land and sea. In August 917, by the small river Ahelloy, near the Black Sea, took place a decisive battle in which the Byzantines were completely routed. Soon after that Simeon defeated the Serbs converting their lands into a Bulgarian province; then undertook a devastating march to the south invading the territories to Corinth, and now he could really call himself King Simeon the Great – as he was in fact master of the Balkan South-East. But while he was preparing for the last march against Byzantium in 927 Simeon died of heart attack.

The period of his rule is known as “The Golden Age” not only because he had expanded the territory of the First Bulgarian Kingdom between three seas – the Black Sea, the Aegean Sea and the Adriatic Sea. Simeon the Great left a bright trace in Bulgarian diplomacy, united the Slavic tribes and developed the schools in Ohrid and Preslav which his father had founded. During his rule were created masterpieces of literature like the Alphabetical Prayer and Preface to the Gospel by Constantine of Preslav, Six Days by Joan Exarch and A Tale of the Letters – the latter is considered by some researchers as a work of the King himself under the pen-name Chernorizets Hrabar. The 9th and 10th centuries were also an époque of vigorous blossoming of arts and crafts, architecture and sculpture.

Decline

However, Simeon the Great left also a dark trace in Bulgarian history. The society was exhausted of all those wars he waged and the problems of social inequality had sharpened. In the second half of the 10th century appeared a new danger: the Varangians under Oleg seized from the Hazars Kiev – the old Slavic settlement on trade route between Scandinavia and Constantinople – to settle there in 882 the capital of a state named Kievan Russia and soon their horsemen were on the north banks of the Danube...

The son of Simeon the Great, Petar, ruled from 927 to 969 following a peaceful foreign policy. He married his granddaughter to the Byzantine Emperor and signed a 40-years peace treaty. But there was already an unstable atmosphere in the state which helped the Serbs to restore their independent principality and split off from the Bulgarian kingdom. Peter also suffered a series of defeats from the Prince of Kiev, Svetoslav – an ally of the Emperor Nicephorus II Phocas – after which he fell sick and retired to a monastery. His son, Boris II (969–971), ascended the throne. When Svetoslav undertook his serial march in Bulgaria the King concluded a peace treaty with him and in 970 the united army of Bulgarians and Russians attacked Byzantium. This time, however, the Byzantines won and Boris II was taken to Constantinople as a prisoner of war. A huge part of the state – the lands between the Danube, the Black Sea and the Balkan Range – fell in Byzantine hands. What remained of Bulgaria – the Western Kingdom, with its capital at Prespa and later at Ohrid – was ruled by King Samuel (991–1014) and his brothers – David, Moses and Aaron. They tried to restore the territory of the state by wedging a war against Byzantium but soon David and Moses were killed, and on suspicion of betrayal Aaron was executed by Samuel. The King succeeded to liberate the north-eastern parts of the state and led his army to the south aiming at Thrace, Macedonia and the city of Thessaloniki. Once again luck betrayed the Bulgarians and after losing several battles the eastern part of the state was ripped off by Byzantium. In July 1014 an epic battle took place in Macedonia. The Bulgarians were defeated; 15 000 soldiers were captured and the Emperor Basil II ordered all to be blinded leaving just a single



The Bachkovo Monastery was founded in 1083 by two Georgians, Grigoriy and Abasiy Pakuriani, who were in the service of the Byzantine Emperor Alexis Comnenus – the first as a governor of Adrianople, the other as a general.

one-eyed out of every 100 to lead the others on their road back... At the sight of this affecting tragedy Samuel died of a heart attack.



A map of the lands on which the events around the establishing and the rise of the First Bulgarian Kingdom took place.

In the following years the Bulgarian Kingdom slowly gave in under the pressure of Byzantium. Some nobles raised swords in defence of their fortresses but soon were compelled to surrender and around 1018 Emperor Basil II – named “Killer of Bulgarians” – triumphed on the Bulgarian lands. Almost two centuries of Byzantine subjugation were at hand ...

Since break of day, O mother, dear mother, faintly glowing,
Upon their way, O mother, dear mother, troops are going.
Horse after horse, O mother, dear mother, soldier on soldier,
Swords like the sun, O mother, dear mother, shining boldly.

Taken from a folk poetry dedicated to Tsar Ivan Shishman, translated
by Peter Tempest



The entrance to the castle of Tsarevets in Veliko Turnovo – the capital city of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom.

CHAPTER 3

THE SECOND BULGARIAN KINGDOM: 1185 - 1396

Bulgaria under the Dynasty of the Assenids

The period of Byzantine subjugation lasted for 168 years but the Bulgarians did not submit to the oppressors. The Bulgarian lands became the boundary between Europe and the Empire. The devastating marches of the First (1096–1097) and the Second (1147) crusades ran across the Bulgarian territory. The Byzantine Empire fell in a crisis in the summer of 1185 – being attacked simultaneously by the Seljuk Turks, the Magyars, the Pechenegs and the Normans – and increased the taxation burden on the Bulgarian population which provoked mass discontent among the oppressed. The struggle

against Byzantium was headed by Petar and Assen, two boyars who held the fortress of Turnovo. In the autumn of the same year the rising was proclaimed to the assembled people in the Church of St Demetrius and Petar (1185–1197) was crowned for the first tsar of the second Bulgarian kingdom, with Turnovo as his capital...



Tsarevets: the castle in Veliko Tarnovo which remained as a capital city of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom until 1396.

regain new Bulgarian territories from the Empire. Meanwhile Petar ceded the throne to his brother Assen (1190–1196), realizing that he was a better statesman and military commander. In the following years the new Bulgarian kingdom added many Balkan regions to its territory. Finally King Assen I was assassinated by his cousin Ivanko who headed a conspiracy of boyars faithful to Constantinople, so Petar ascended the throne to rule for one more year, but he also became a victim of the treacherous plot...

On the throne came the third brother, Kaloyan (1197–1207), and showed himself as a wise statesman, a remarkable commander and skilled diplomat. The borders of Bulgaria already stretched far to the west. In 1202 the Byzantine Emperor and Kaloyan concluded a peace treaty – which actually verified the territorial acquisitions of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom – and the Tsar was pronounced as “Emperor of Bulgaria and Wallachia”. In 1204 the Crusaders captured Constantinople. The Byzantines rebelled against Baldwin I of Flanders, imposed on them as the first

After the Bulgarians initiated several military actions against the Byzantine garrisons in Moesia and to the north of the Danube once again the Byzantine Emperor led a large army to the north of the Balkan Mountains. But the Bulgarian rulers used the knights of the German Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, who participated in the Third Crusade, to



In ‘Baldwin’s Tower’ was imprisoned the first Latin Emperor of the East, defeated on 14th April 1205 by Tsar Kaloyan (1197–1207).

Emperor of the East. They called Kaloyan to help them. Baldwin I laid claim to the former Byzantine territories which had fallen into Kaloyan's hands, his Latin troops raided Thrace and seized a number of Bulgarian fortresses. After a quick preparation the decisive battle took place on 14th April 1205 near the town of Adrianople. The Latins were defeated, their Emperor was taken prisoner to the fortress of Turnovo and executed after some time in what later became known as the Baldwin's Tower. Now Kaloyan became the real master of the Balkans and, like Basil II who called himself "Killer of Bulgarians", Kaloyan called himself "Killer of Byzantines". Two years later another Latin army led by Boniface of Montferrat was routed and its leader died in action. Simeon's dream of conquering the entire Byzantine Empire and of a triumphant Bulgarian parade in Constantinople was revived once again...

During a siege of Thessaloniki the third brother also fell victim to another boyar plot: in the autumn of 1207 he was killed in his tent. One of the plotters – and nephew to Kaloyan – King Boril

(1207–1218) ascended to the throne. A political crisis broke up. As the usurper Boril initiated a persecution of all Kaloyan's relatives his two nephews, sons of the old king Assen, Ivan Assen and Alexander, fled to Russia. For some time, however, the conflicts along the borders of the country were suspended due to the treaties with the Latin Empire and the Hungarian Kingdom but the resentment within sharpened. A factor that additionally jeopardized the crown became the movement of the Bogomils. So in 1211 Boril held the Council of Turnovo which condemned the new heresy. Uprisings broke up. Taking advantage of the confusion and assisted by a Russian military unit Ivan Assen II laid a continuous siege to the

capital Turnovo, dethroned Boril and blinded him. Thus the successor of the Dynasty of the Assenids, King Ivan II Assen (1218–1241) came to the throne.

Ivan II Assen inaugurated a period of prosperity during which Bulgaria regained the frontiers it had achieved under Tsar Simeon the Great. An economic and cultural upsurge marked his rule. The new king's diplomacy consolidated the state and strengthened the relations with the Latin Empire and Hungary. A peace treaty was signed with the ruler of the Epirus region Theodore Comnenus. Ivan II Assen even engaged his daughter Elena to the Byzantine Emperor Baldwin II, still under age by the time. But Theodore Comnenus violated the peace treaty and led a large army north-



From the fortress of Tsar Ivan II Assen (1218–41), built after his victory at Klokotnitsa in 1230, only ruins of one of the towers and a small church survived.



The Church of the Virgin of Petrich in Ivan II Assen's Fortress.

wards. In March 1230 the Bulgarians gained a brilliant victory over the Byzantine army near Klokotnitsa after which got hold of Macedonia, Albania, the Rhodopes and the Aegean. Once again Bulgaria stretched its borders to the shores of three seas...

The indisputable Bulgarian hegemony of South-Eastern Europe made the Pope in Rome get concerned with the future of the Latin Empire. His emissaries instigated the Hungarians to attack Bulgaria from the north but soon this new threat was eliminated by the Bulgarian sword. The considerable territorial expansion of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom was followed by peaceful years that led to economic growth. For the first time the Bulgarian king Ivan II Assen initiated the minting of coins...

The Bogomils and other religious movements in Medieval Bulgaria

Undoubtedly, the dynasty of the Assenids (1186–1280) prompted the power and the prestige of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom in the European Medieval world. But, of course, its history also knew periods of social and political crises. The incessant growth of private property and the deeper stratification of the population in the rural commune contributed to the sharpening of the relations between the ranks of the people and the upper strata of the Bulgarian society. In such periods emerged and developed certain social and religious movements. The Bogomil movement distinguished not only by the dualistic religious beliefs – a conception of the two principles: good and evil – but also by political nationalism and resentment of Byzantine culture. Observing the mismatch between words and deeds of the clergy, people started gradually losing faith in the Christian religion. The Bogomils renounced the official church, its symbols and rites, as well as the need for its ministers. They preached rejection of luxury, riches and bodily pleasures; repudiated marriage; renounced violence, war and cruelty.

Between the 9th and the 12th century the Bogomil movement penetrated into Byzantium, Serbia, Wallachia, Kievan Russia, and in the centuries that followed it spread to Italy and France. In the Western world the followers of the Bogomil teaching were called Cathars and Albigenses. Later, in the 14th century also appeared the teaching of the Adamites who claimed that social inequality was not of a divine origin, so they called on people not to wear clothes: like Adam, the first man in Eden. Again in the 14th century under the influence of Byzantium among the Bulgarian monks penetrated Hesychasm [from the Greek *hesychazo*, e. g. “being silent”] – an ascetic and meditative teaching. Also from Byzantium came the philosophical and religious doctrine of Varlaam and Akindin called Varlaamism which contained many rational elements combined with criticism of the sumptuous and costly church rituals. And, on the eve of Bulgaria’s fall under Turkish subjugation, the heresy of the Jews was quite widespread as well.

The “peasant King”

Along with the religious movements the second half of the 13th century saw the progressive weakening of the Bulgarian Kingdom, torn by the continual conflicts between the boyars. Ground down by taxation, the peasants also rebelled. An additional aggravating circumstance was the incursions of the Tatars from the “Golden Horde”...

In this situation broke out the uprising, led by the swineherd Ivailo. He gathered a small peasant detachment somewhere in Dobrudja, and, addressing his soldiers, Ivailo maintained that by the divine providence he had to save the state... In 1277 the rural commander routed the troops of the last Assenid, King Constantine Assen Tich, then slayed him and headed for the capital. In Turnovo waited the boyars and Queen Maria – who was willing to retain the throne for her son. Of course, the Byzan-

tine Emperor had to intervene in the internal political life of Bulgaria, since he did not want any peasant indignation to penetrate the Empire as well. For which he concentrated a big army in Eastern Thrace. When the peasant leader was forced to fight at two fronts – that of the Turnovo boyars and that of the Byzantines – he had to compromise: in 1278 he married the Queen. Now the gates of the capital city were opened before him and Ivailo (1277–1280) was crowned as “the good King”...

As part of Ivailo's army had to defend the Balkan Range passes from the Byzantine troops and the “peasant king” himself had to head north to drive back the Tatar hordes, which had again penetrated into Bulgaria, the Queen and the boyars let in Turnovo the Byzantines. Unable to seize the capital city again the peasant leader was compelled to watch how his army slowly thinned down and sought help from the Tatars but their chief ordered his assassination. However, Ivailo's uprising might be compared to that of Wat Tyler (1381) in England, who was cheated by Richard II, or to the Jacquerie (1385) in France, crashed by Charles II of Navarre.

The decline

After Ivailo was dethroned and met his death the boyars put on the throne Georgi Terter (1280–1293) – the first of the Terterid dynasty which ruled until 1323. Those were decades of territorial fragmentation and hegemony of Tatar agents in the government of the state. The Byzantine Empire gradually grew weaker and became economically dependent on the Italian republics Venice and Genoa.



Through many centuries the fortress of Belogradchik protected the Kingdom against the aggression of western neighbours.

Meanwhile, Serbia marked the highest point in its medieval development and under the reign of Stefan Doushan many Bulgarian and Byzantine lands fell in its confines. Of all Terterids only Todor Svetoslav (1300–1321) was able for a time to put an end to the intestine struggles and achieve a settlement with the Tatar Khans. But the splitting among the boyars, in one hand, and among the Balkan peoples, in another, continued...

The third dynasty of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom, the Shishmanids, ruled from 1323 to 1393. Its founder, King Michail Shishman (1323–1330), waged wars against Serbia and Byzantium – with the aim to recover Macedonia and Thrace – but lost the battle of Velbuzhd against the Serbs in 1330 and died of his wounds. The next year Ivan Alexander (1331–1371) came to the throne and succeeded to achieve a relative stability both of the state and of its foreign relations. Nevertheless, the processes of feudal separation were irreversible and different independent estates gradually took shape in the region of Dobrudja – under the rule of the brothers Balik, Todor and Dobrotitsa, in the Rhodopes and the Aegean, in Macedonia...

In 1355 king Ivan Alexander chose the Vidin region as his kingdom and entrusted its government to his first son, Ivan Sratsimir. The Turnovo region was given the same statute and was entrusted to the second son, Ivan Shishman (1371–1396). During the Shishmanid dynasty Bulgaria saw a renewal of the splendid traditions of Byzantine culture, and literature, painting and sculpture flourished. But, already dismembered, the kingdom could not long withstand the rising Ottoman Empire...

The struggle against the Ottoman Turks

As a young and aggressive power the Ottoman Empire expanded in Asia Minor and soon sought to conquer new lands in the Balkans and in Europe. The first settlement of the Turks on the Balkans dates back to 1352. In 1364 the army of Sultan Murad already penetrated deep in Thrace and seized Plovdiv and Stara Zagora. Meanwhile, the Hungarians launched a powerful offensive from the North-West and the Vidin kingdom fell in their hands. The Turks had planned their march in three strategic directions: along the coast of the Aegean Sea towards Macedonia; along the diagonal of the Balkan Peninsula, heading for Central Europe; towards Dobrudja and the lands beyond the Danube. In 1369 they were already in Adrianople, which became their capital city. In 1371, after the death of King Ivan Alexander, the united armies of the two Macedonian rulers were defeated. Now the path to the north-west, cutting through the Bulgarian lands, was already open...

Gradually the Turks seized Northern Thrace and the Rhodopes region. Then they penetrated into the North-Eastern Bulgaria, crossing the Balkan Range, and now the Ottoman menace was already imminent for Wallachia and Moldavia. Becoming aware of the danger, the Serbian King Lazar built a Christian coalition, which was joined, on the Bulgarian side, only by King Ivan Shishman and Ivanko, the new ruler of Dobrudja. In 1387 the Turks suffered their first, yet sole, defeat. But the battle of Kosovo Pole in the summer of 1389 was of key significance for the fortunes of the Balkan states: they collapsed one after another under the pressure of the Turks...

In 1393 the Turkish military commander Chelebi laid a three-month siege of Turnovo. Finally the city surrendered. The Turks had decided to wipe out the whole population and Patriarch Evtimiy hardly managed to persuade them that for the purpose of imposing their authority it would be sufficient to kill only 111 representatives of the nobility...

The Central and West European states were startled by the rapid achievements of the Turks and made an attempt to oppose them. The Hungarian King Sigismund organized a crusade against the Ottoman Empire. In the autumn of 1396, however, Sigismund suffered a grave defeat at Nikopol. Finally the Ottoman Turks became the masters of the Bulgarian lands. As the Second Bulgarian Kingdom ceased to exist the Balkan peoples entered into the darkest period of their history...



Ivan II Asen's
Bulgaria

A map of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom in its bloom during the first half of the 13th c.

**Last night, shepherd, there passed three columns of chained slaves.
In the first column, shepherd, were maidens in chains.**

...

In the second column, shepherd, were young wives in chains.

...

In the third column, shepherd, were young men in chains.

Taken from "Three Chains of Slaves", folk poetry, translated by Peter Tempest



The 'Mosque of the Baths' (or Banya Bashi Djamiya) in Sofia was built in 1576 by the famous Turkish architect Hadji Mumar Sinan.

CHAPTER 4

UNDER OTTOMAN DOMINATION: 1396–1878

Enslavement or a mere presence?

After the changes of '89 two different opinions were shared among Bulgarian historians concerning the period from 1396 to 1878. Was it a yoke, an époque of enslavement, or can we just talk about a “Turkish presence” on the Balkans? Well, all that is left for us is to judge by the consequences...



The ‘Pomaks’ are former Bulgarian Christians converted to Islam by force during the first two centuries of the Turkish ‘presence’.

At the end of the 14th century the Second Bulgarian Kingdom, corroded by internal struggles and contradictions, fell under the blows of the Ottoman conquerors. Through bloody massacres and destruction was put to death a civilization which had reached its zenith almost half a century before. At least 600 thousand Bulgarians were slaughtered in the course of the invasion, a considerable part of the Balkan population was enslaved and nearly 1,5 million were compelled to leave the former state. Those who remained were excluded from areas of strategic importance and from the fertile plains, and withdrew to the mountains. Some of them became converted to Islam – the Pomaks – and almost achieved equality with the Ottomans. This was a demographic catastrophe which affected severely the further fate of the Bulgarian people.

The subjugated population tasted the pungent spices of the “Turkish presence”, as the policy of the Supreme Porte was to change its identity through a forcible mass conversion to Islam. All Christians – scornfully called “rayah” – were subjected to serious forms of discrimination. They were burdened with a heavy load of taxes and moreover compelled to pay a “blood tax” in the form of a levy of Bulgarian boys who, after being converted to the Moslem religion and receiving instruction in special Turkish schools, were recruited into the notorious corps of Janissaries. In fact, the feudal system imposed in the Bulgarian lands was by far more primitive than the one which the Turks found on the Peninsula. Being in the shadow of the Ottoman Empire Bulgaria was torn off from the European culture and the setting in Renaissance...



The largest and finest mosque in Bulgaria: the Tombul Djamiya in Shumen built by Sherif Pasha in 1745.

However, at the dawn of the 15th century to the west and north, the Ottoman Turks were stopped by the Serbian princes and the Wallachian chieftains. To the east Constantinople, though surrounded on all sides, still bravely defended its independence until 1453. Through the efforts of Vladislav III, the young King of Poland and Hungary, in 1444 Europe organized a coalition against the Ottoman aggression. After unsuccessful battles it was defeated. The resistance organised by the pope in 1457

under the form of an anti-Turkish Crusade and headed by George Castriota (1404–1468), more popular as Scanderbeg, barred the invaders' inroads into Albania till 1468.



A typical sight from Turkish times: the village Kovachevitsa in the mountain Rhodopes.

During the next five centuries the Bulgarians attempted on several occasions to throw off the Ottoman yoke. The movement of the haidouks (sort of Bulgarian partisans) acquired some activity in the 16th and 17th century. In 1598 and in 1686 two uprisings broke out in the former capital of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom Turnovo. Some Bulgarians took part in the wars of

other countries against the Ottoman Empire. But it was not until the middle of the 18th century that began the period known as the National Renaissance...

The awakening

In the 18th century the rest of Europe was already on the threshold of the modern world. Bulgaria, unfortunately, did not have the opportunity to develop those first intimations of the Renaissance that can be seen in certain art or literary works of the 14th century. Political enslavement was aggravated by religious oppression: the Bulgarian Patriarchate was abolished and the Bulgarian Church brought under authority of the Greek Patriarchate.

Moreover, the national consolidation had to take place in the absence of a Bulgarian state – which could have facilitated the process with its organizations.

That is why the Bulgarians and the other Balkan Christians under Turkish domination sought to overthrow the Ottoman bondage and establish their own national states.



The first textile factory in Bulgaria was established in Sliven in 1834. Today its yard is turned into a tourist attraction



A bridge at Etara, near Gabrovo. During the last century of the Turkish 'presence' appeared numerous architectural masterpieces, typical for the époque.

In 1762 the monk Paisiy of the monastery on Mount Athos wrote his Slav-Bulgarian History and in the following decades many copies of the manuscript started circulating to achieve wide distribution of the patriotic and anti-Greek ideas of its author. The work was first printed in 1844. From 1835 onwards began to be established outside the monasteries schools teaching in the Bulgarian language. In all larger towns sprang up "reading rooms" which made a powerful contribution to the development of national consciousness and to the diffusion of the national culture.

Meanwhile, the 18th century was marked by a decay of the Turkish military and feudal system. Gradually, the Bulgarian lands became a field for the economic activities of many foreigners and this implied even closer economic links with the Western states. The rapid economic development created the material prerequisites for the rise of the Bulgarian national liberation movement.

So the remarkable work of the monk of Mount Athos served its historical purpose: to become the first national program for political and spiritual emancipation of the Bulgarians. In 1806 he created a collection of festive precepts called A Sabbath Book and this was the first Bulgarian printed book. The idea that a modern Bulgarian school should be set up was first conceived by Petar Beron who acquired his thorough college education in Heidelberg and Munich. In 1824 was published his famous Fish Primer regarded by historians as the actual beginning of the new Bulgarian education. The struggle for the establishment of the popular Bulgarian idiom as the language of education, divine service and literature continued. In 1844 the first Bulgarian magazine *Lyuboslovie* was published by Konstantin Fotinov in Smyrna (present-day Izmir in Asia Minor) and two years later, in



The narrow passages between the houses in the villages were a perfect place for gossiping against the Sultan...

Leipzig, Ivan Bogorov leafed through the pages of the first Bulgarian newspaper *Bulgarski orel* (Bulgarian Eagle). Many young Bulgarians continued their education in renowned European universities or in the capital cities of neighboring Balkan states. In 1869 a Bulgarian Literary society was set up in Braila, Romania, and later it developed into the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. The educational processes in Bulgaria went on and the Bulgarian intellectuals helped the people share the cultural achievements of Europe but in the conditions of keen rivalry among the Great powers within the framework of what came

to be known as the Eastern Question. France had its Catholic missions in European Turkey which exerted the most powerful impact in this respect. The Bulgarian educational cause was also promoted and supported by the British and American Protestant missions in the Bulgarian lands. But the struggle for national liberation was impeded from developing by yet another obstacle: the Bulgarian Church actually did not exist as an independent institution and Greek clergy occupied almost all high positions in the ecclesiastic hierarchy.



*The monument of the "Apostle of Freedom"
Vassil Levski (1837–73) in Veliko Turnovo.*

When an independent Greek state was established in 1830 the assimilating efforts of the Greek bishops became visible quite clearly. This led to the well-known Easter action of the Bulgarian parish in Constantinople of 3rd April 1860. On that day Ilarion Makariopolski declared solemnly, in the Bulgarian Church, the separation of the Bulgarian Christians from the Constantinople Patriarchate. Some time later, on 28th February 1870 was established a Bulgarian Church, independent of the Greek Patriarchate at Constantinople and, according to the decree of the Sultan, was recognized the separateness of the Bulgarian nation. A year later the Exarchate Charter of the Bulgarian Church was adopted, and in February 1872 the eminent metropolitan of Vidin Antim I was elected as the first Bulgarian Exarch. Finally, the Bulgarian nation was recognized by the Turkish Government as an independent ethnic community within the limits of the Ottoman Empire.

The struggle which turned into a National Revolution

The end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century were marked by a decline in the political and economical life in the Ottoman Empire. The successive wars with Russia from 1786 to 1829 led to providing the Tsar's right of patronizing the Balkan Christians. Despite the aggressive intentions of Russia to lay its hands on the Straits – the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles – and gain access to the Aegean Sea, the wars played a positive role for the development of the Bulgarian and the other Balkan national liberation movements. Now the Eastern Question was already regarded in two aspects: the struggle of the peoples enslaved by Turkey for political emancipation and the rivalry among the Great powers for partition of the territorial inheritance coming from the declining Ottoman Empire.



*The monument of the revolutionary Hristo Botev (1848–76) in Vratsa.
He remained as a symbol of the Bulgarian morale during the Turkish oppression.*

During the first half of the 19th century some Bulgarian refugees left their homeland to form communities in Wallachia, Bessarabia and Southern Russia, and took part in the Russian-Turkish wars. Bulgarian volunteers fought actively in the two successive Serbian uprisings initiated in 1804. Bulgarians participated also in the Greek national revolution of 1821–1829. In the 50's, during the Crimean war, the young Bulgarian revolutionary George Rakovski (1821–1867) – considered as the founder of the organized national liberation movement – set up a Secret Society in Constantinople whose task was to urge the Bulgarian people to rise in an armed struggle in the course of the military action. With permission from the Serbian government and with the help of Italian secret societies Rakovski organized the training of a regiment in Belgrade known as the First Bulgarian Legion. Among its soldiers was Vasil Levski (1837–1873) – the future great revolutionary. In 1862 this Legion took part in a clash with the Turks but after a turn in the political relations between Serbia and the Supreme Porte was disbanded. Bitterly disappointed, Rakovski came to believe that liberation should be gained by employing Bulgaria's own national forces. Later, after the utter defeat of the biggest detachment led by Hadji Dimitar and Stefan Karadja which crossed the Danube to fight the Turks in the summer of 1868, was closed the last page of the detachment tactics' period of the national liberation movement. The unsuccessful Second Bulgarian Legion formed in the same year proved that too. A new stage in the struggle commenced: an Internal Revolutionary Organization was set up in 1869 under the leadership of the newly established Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee. Ahead of this committee stood Liuben Karavelov (1837–1879), Levski and Hristo Botev (1848–1876).

“Freedom or death!”

In 1869 Levski founded the first revolutionary committees and thereby laid the foundations of the Internal Revolutionary Organization. In three years he built the organizational structure of the resistance creating hundreds of committees more in urban and rural areas. By 1872 the Bulgarians already lived with the thought of the forthcoming insurrection. Levski had established himself as a veritable leader for which was rightfully called the Apostle of Freedom. Then the conspiracy was betrayed, many people were put under arrest. In December 1872 the Apostle himself was detained and brought before the Turkish court where he behaved with dignity. Levski was hung on 19th February 1873 in the outskirts of Sofia.



The Dryanovo monastery: several hundred rebels barricaded themselves in it from 1st to 7th May during the rising of 1876 and put up a desperate resistance to the Turkish army.

A time of profound crisis followed in the entire revolutionary organization. In order to escape from the Turks most revolutionaries had to flee to Wallachia. But then in August 1875 a Grand Meeting was held in Bucharest which decided that an immediate uprising should be declared. This time Botev – with the extraordinary power of an ideologist and a revolutionary leader – articulated his views of a fraternal union of the Balkan nations. One of the most energetic leaders in the Committee was Stefan Stambolov (1854–1895). Under the chairmanship of Stambolov the participants decided that a general uprising was to be prepared by the spring of 1876. The Bulgarians would fight until the uprising developed into an All-European matter and the Great Powers intervened...

And so, between 14th and 16th of April 1876, a general meeting of committee representatives was held in the forest of Oborishte, an area not far from the town of Panagyurishte. However, due to betrayal, the uprising commenced prematurely: on 20th of April instead of 1st of May. The rebels from the villages between the Rhodopes and the Balkan Range were ready to accomplish the holiest sacrifice... But the Turkish garrisons were already roused. The insurgent settlements were targeted by columns of regular army soldiers and hordes of bashibazouks. A British military instructor participated in the crushing of the uprising. What followed during the next days was a bloody massacre. The Turks initiated inhuman atrocities. Two weeks later Botev and his 200 adherents crossed the Danube on

board the Austrian ship Radetzki, headed south to create another centre of the struggle, but after unequal battle his men were dispersed and he was shot to death in the head...



The monument of a Bulgarian military commander in Blagoevgrad from the time of the rising of April 1876.

There were different reasons for the failure of the April Uprising. Some historians emphasize the weakness of the Bulgarian national bourgeoisie which was not capable of leading the national liberation movement. Others stress on the numerical and military superiority of the Turkish troops. But in a broad historical perspective the April Uprising should not be regarded as a failure. The "Bulgarian Question" was becoming a tough international problem. At that point

of time the long-lasting endeavor of official Russia to do away with the Turkish presence in Europe, to expand the Russian influence in the Balkans and to lay its hands on the Straits objectively coincided with the liberation struggle of the Bulgarians. The West European diplomacy also sprang to action. At the turn of 1876 the Constantinople diplomatic conference was held. It was attended by representatives of Russia, Great Britain, Austria-Hungary, Germany, France, Italy and Turkey. Now the last attempt at a peaceful settlement of the "Bulgarian Question" was the London Protocol – signed at the end of March 1877 by the diplomatic representatives of the six Great Powers in the English capital. But even then the Sublime Porte repudiated the demands for reform actions in the European area of the Empire. There was no more room or time for hesitation on the part of the Russian emperor Alexander II. On 22nd April 1877 he issued an imperial manifesto declaring the beginning of the War of Liberation...

A costly freedom

From June to the fall of 1877 the Russian troops gradually unfolded their successful military operations divided into three columns. Along with the Russians fought thousands of Bulgarian volunteers. In the war against Turkey participated also other countries like Romania and Finland. After a series



The bone-vault in Pleven still keeps the memory of the fallen in the Russian-Turkish war of 1877-78.

of sieges the talented Russian General Totleben crushed the resistance of the surrounded Turkish garrison at Plevna and at the end of November 1877 it surrendered. General Gourko defeated the strong army of Suleiman Pasha positioned in South Bulgaria. Soon Sofia also fell. In a few months the

Turks were driven out of Plovdiv and the Rhodopes. As the road to Constantinople was already open the Sublime Porte pleaded for peace...

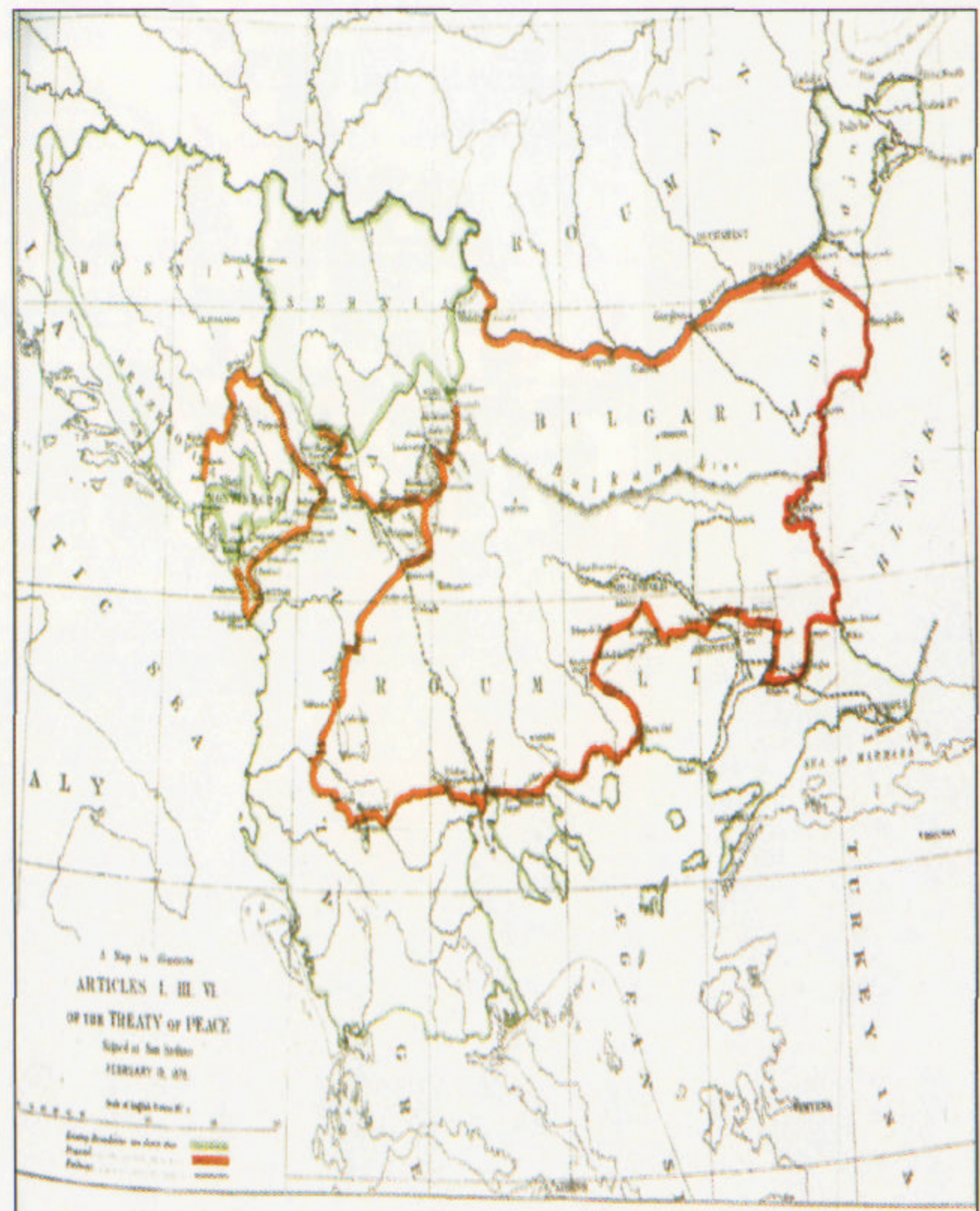


An impressive exposition depicting the Russian-Turkish war of 1877-78 is gathered at the Panorama Museum in Plevna.

On 3rd March 1878 a preliminary peace treaty was signed between Russia and the Ottoman Empire in the Constantinople suburb of San Stefano. But the Western Great Powers – and most of all the United Kingdom and Austro-Hungary – were concerned that a big Slav state in the middle of the Balkan Peninsula would become an important fulcrum of the Russian influence.

That is why the Congress of Ber-

lin held in the summer of 1878 disrupted the territorial integrity of the newly created state to satisfy self-interested political ambitions. So Thrace – which was given the name Eastern Roumelia – was left in subordination to the Sublime Porte. Macedonia remained under Turkish power. Indigenous Bulgarian lands were included in the boundaries of Serbia and Romania. Thus Bulgaria was ruptured into five pieces. In fact, the Congress of Berlin set the charge of irreconcilable national and territorial contradictions in the relations between the young Balkan states...



A map of the ill-fated Fatherland – divided!

**Arise! With song I've come to wake you.
It's high time you were up and out!
Come, see bright sun the shadows chasing!
Your chamber leave and look about!**

Taken from "A New Day" by Petko Slaveikov
(1827–1895), translated by Peter Tempest



The biggest Bulgarian cathedral Alexander Nevski in Sofia, named after the patron saint of the liberating Tsar Alexander II.

CHAPTER 5

THE THIRD BULGARIAN KINGDOM BETWEEN TWO FATEFUL TREATIES AND THROUGH TWO NATIONAL CATASTROPHES: 1878–1919

The Liberation

Alarmed by the increasing prestige of Russia – as demonstrated by the eventual establishment of a Greater Bulgaria obedient to the will of the Tsar – the Western Powers convened the Congress of Berlin (July 1878) which revised the treaty of San Stefano. Its chairman, the German Chancellor Otto von Bismark, roared: “Gentlemen, we have gathered here to ensure the European peace and not the happiness of the Bulgarians!” Well, that far with the Bulgarian happiness... Northern Bulgaria, or the Bulgarian

Principality, became a vassal state dependent on the Sultan and was to be governed by an elected prince. Macedonia and Lower Thrace were detached from the new kingdom, thus depriving it of a valuable outlet to the Aegean, and under the name Eastern Roumelia, with a governor designated by the Sublime Porte, would depend politically and militarily on Turkey.



The monument on Mount Stoletov near the village Shipka was dedicated to the fierce fighting against the Turks that took place in August 1877.

popular representation”. Following the recommendation of the Russian Emperor the Grand National Assembly elected the German Prince Alexander of Battenberg as the Prince of Bulgaria. On 5th July 1879 Todor Bourmov was named the first Prime Minister of the Third Bulgarian Kingdom by virtue of a decree issued by the Prince.

In the following years the political life in Bulgaria was dominated by the newly formed two parties: Liberals and Conservatives. The clash between them was added to the diplomatic difficulties that the Prince had with Russia. In the conditions of unceasing internal struggle for power, a coup d’etat, government overthrows and a temporary regime of “emergency powers” went the rule of Alexander of Battenberg until the fall of 1885...



The Monument to the Liberators – built between 1901 and 1907 – on the square in front of the National Assembly in Sofia.

Unification at last!

On 6th September 1885, following an intense popular agitation and unrest against the Sultan in many urban and rural areas, Eastern Roumelia proclaimed its union with Bulgaria. The armed Bulgarian detachments entered Plovdiv. Two days later Alexander I approved the Unification by means of a



The National Assembly (the Parliament) in Sofia was built in three stages between 1884 and 1928.

manifesto and became the Prince of the united Bulgarian Kingdom. That was a great historical event which turned Bulgaria into one of the biggest and powerful states on the Balkans. The Sublime Porte, the Russian emperor Alexander III, as well as Berlin, Paris, Rome and Vienna, renounced the Unification as a violation of the Treaty of Berlin. London waited to see which way the cat jumps...

Urged on by Austro-Hungary, King Milan of Serbia declared war on Bulgaria, on the pretext that the political equilibrium of the Balkan Peninsula had been upset. The authorities in Athens also feared that it would be easier for Bulgaria, in its extended and powerful version, to have its claims on Macedonia – contested by all three states – honored. In November 1885 the Serbian troops violated the Bulgarian western border. But a quick and unexpected turn in the war followed and provided King Milan with a total defeat. As the Bulgarian forces put to flight the Serbian army and headed north-west on Serbian territory Vienna sent its message: either the Bulgarians should stop and go back or they would be at war with Austro-Hungary as well. So in February 1886 the Treaty of Bucharest recognized the unification of the two Bulgarian states.

But Emperor Alexander III refused to support the Unification. To Battenberg he was the worst enemy of Bulgaria. Those who shared the Prince's sentiments – and came to be known as "Russophobes" – advised that the Bulgarian foreign policy should be orientated towards the Western states. The others, unconditional friends of the liberator Russia, with whom Bulgaria had a common religion, formed the powerful and multitudinous trend of the "Russophiles". The struggle between the two extreme trends quickly created a strong political tension. In the night of August 8th and in the small hours of August 9th 1886 a group of pro-Russian officers staged another coup d'état, dethroned the Prince and sent him to Russia under escort. The reaction of the Russian emperor was swift and in a few days Alexander I was back on the throne but at the end of August he was compelled to abdicate. A three-member Council of Regents was elected, and Stambolov, as the leading figure, did his best so that the Grand National Assembly to reject the new Russian candidate for the Bulgarian throne, Prince Mingreli of Georgia. That put an end to the Russian influence and soon a Bulgarian delegation set off for the European capital cities in search of a new Prince...



The former Royal Palace was turned into a National Gallery of Art and an Ethnographic Museum by the Communist regime.

Bulgaria's new Prince and his new Prime Minister Stambolov

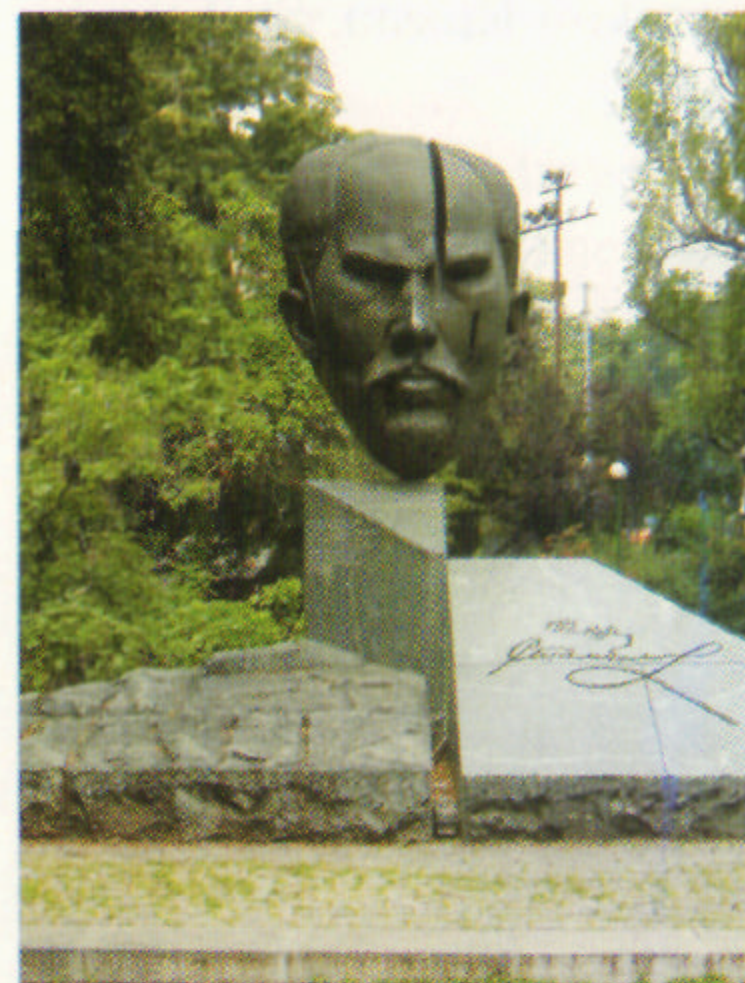
Finally, in June 1887 the Grand National Assembly elected the Austro-Hungarian candidate, the German hereditary Prince Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg Gotha (1861–1948), as a Bulgarian ruler and he entrusted the 33 year old Stambolov to form a government. The new Prime Minister headed a Cabinet of the People's Liberal Party that he had just created and soon the Cabinet concluded advantageous trade agreements with the Western states. An economic boom followed: foreign investments augmented, banking and insurance made progress, numerous road and railway construction projects stepped up. In 1892 for the first time was opened the Plovdiv Fair where traders offered commodities. Meanwhile, in 1888 was founded the first Bulgarian College – the University of Sofia. Stambolov's rule laid out the foundations of the modern and dynamic development. But the changes in the international situation deprived the Prime Minister of the support of Austro-Hungary and Brit-



The Military Club was one of the first buildings in Sofia built in the "Renaissance" style to the design of the Czech architect Kolar in 1907.

Years of growth, years of zeal for liberty...

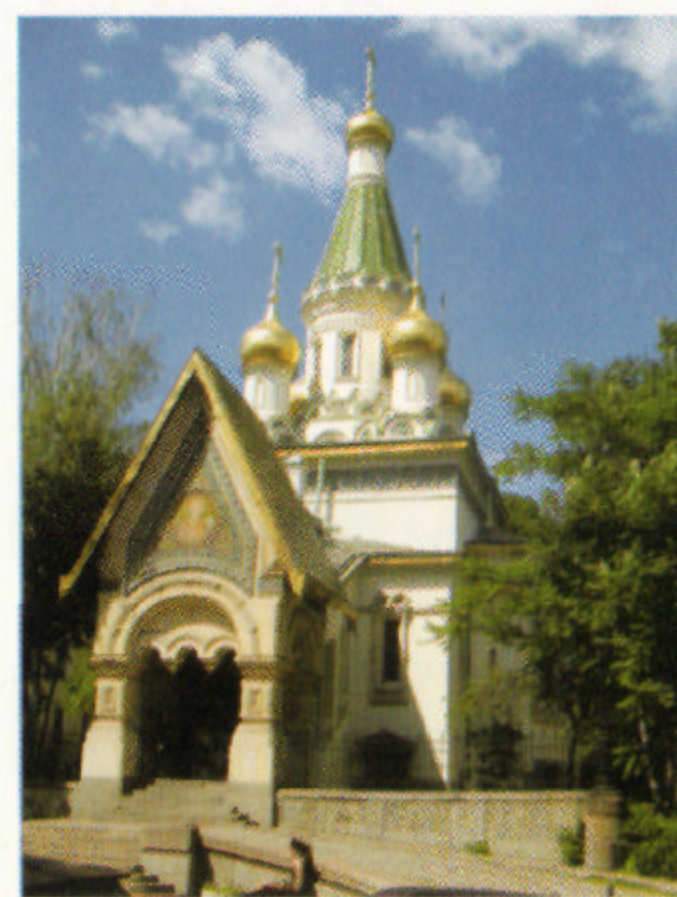
By the end of the 19th century the political aspect of the Bulgarian social life was completely shaped. From the beginning of the 20th century till World War I the Bulgarian political spectrum was extremely varied but there were neither definitely powerful parties nor a classical division into a left wing, right wing and a center. The six bourgeois parties were mainly distinguished in terms of the foreign policy orientation of their Russophile or Russophobe membership. In a poor country like Bulgaria a political career was often viewed as a means of personal enrichment. Frequently Ferdinand himself spread dissension among the parties and their wings so as to facilitate his own control on them...



On an inappropriate place in the center of Sofia can be seen a bizarre monument to one of the most contradictory figures in Bulgarian history, Stefan Stambolov.

ain, for they already sought rapprochement with

Russia. The senior officers were also against Stambolov and a pro-Russian plot in March 1891 led to a stiffening of the authoritarian regime. However, until 1894 Bulgaria remained under his dictatorship and his anti-Russian policy was supported by harsh police methods. Then Ferdinand, unable any more to stomach the extremist policy of his Prime Minister, accepted Stambolov's resignation. A year later "the Bulgarian Bismark" was slain with cruel hatred in a Sofia street...



The Russian Church of St Nicholas in Sofia was built in 1914 at the request of the diplomatic representative Kurilo who found the Bulgarian church schismatic and refused to take part in its services...

After the fall of Stambolov, the Cabinet of the People's Party – headed by the skillful politician K. Stoilov – governed Bulgaria for five years. The Prime Minister achieved a reestablishment of the relations with Russia. Still the biggest problem remained Macedonia: the political and social reality

there as well as in the Odrin region of Thrace – both still under Turkish rule – indicated that an uprising was the only option for the local Bulgarians. In the beginning of the 20th century the Sultan was still far from any intention to start the reforms in the Christian provinces of European Turkey, as stipulated by the Treaty of Berlin. In those godforsaken regions the morale of the people was suppressed by misery, insecurity ruined artisans and merchants and peasants endured the taxation practices of the local Turkish administration. All the time thousands of Bulgarians from Macedonia and Eastern Thrace sought shelter in the fatherland...



The National Theatre in Sofia, built to the design of the Vienna architects Felmer and Helmer, was opened on 3rd January 1907.

However, the only upholder of the Bulgarian spirit in Macedonia and in the Odrin region was the Exarchate. In the autumn of 1893 the most resolute patriots in those lands established a clandestine formation in Thessaloniki, later called Internal Macedonian- Odrin Revolutionary Organization (IMORO). Its founders adopted the concept of a political autonomy of Macedonia and the Odrin region of Thrace within the Ottoman Empire as a first step of their annexation to the Principality of Bulgaria in the foreseeable future. Often its military units punished the Turkish rulers and defended the Bulgarians against the encroachments of the Serbian and Greek detachments. In 1903 an insurrection broke out in Thrace but the rebels were crushed and the result was hundreds of villages set on fire and thousands of dead. And once again Europe turned its back to the desperate Bulgarian zeal for liberty. So the Macedonian Question became a standing issue for the diplomacy. In time everybody in Bulgaria realized that the road to a national unity passed through a war against Turkey...

When in 1908 the leader of the Democratic Party Alexander Malinov stood ahead of the government he temporarily soothed the feelings and fostered the endeavor of the Bulgarians in Macedonia, Eastern and Aegean Thrace to attain unification with the fatherland but first the Principality had to break free from the dependence on the Sultan imposed by the Treaty of Berlin. However, 1908 proved to be favourable for such a step due to the Young Turk revolution, which created a tense situation in the Ottoman Empire and on the Balkans. After an unofficial agreement between Sofia and Vienna, on 22nd September 1908 the medieval Bulgarian capital city



The Catholic Cathedral of the Dormition in Varna was built by Kanev to the design of Pomerancev (1880–6).

Turnovo once again witnessed a historical event: Bulgaria was solemnly proclaimed an independent state! It was there that Prince Ferdinand acquired the desired title “King of the Bulgarians”. As Bulgaria’s independence was recognized, it finally acquired a legal status equal to that of the other European states.



Synagogue in Sofia was built in Hispano-Arabic style at the beginning of the 20th c. to the design of the architect Grünenger.

So in the course of three decades the Bulgarians traversed the fateful crossroad between the Orient and Europe. The Bulgarian people were quick to emerge from the economic stagnation of the Ottoman Empire seeking to reach the level of the advanced countries.

The immediate result was that in the very first decade of the new century the young Bulgarian industry scored a seven-fold increase in its production. The state favored the local industry through tax concessions and protectionist custom policies. Bulgaria’s rapid economic development at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century found manifestation in the advancement of the agricultural, commercial and industrial sectors. Around 1910 the country went ahead of its neighbors in terms of nearly all economic indicators. The process of cultural and intellectual renovation permeated all spheres of science, literature and arts, sports. So, supported by such a promising economic and spiritual potential, in 1912 the Bulgarians could already set about to resolve their national question by military means...

The Balkan Wars

As capital industry, which was now developing in Bulgaria, needed trade outlets in the Aegean and at the same time the people of Macedonia and Lower Thrace were still groaning under the Turkish yoke probably only a war could satisfy the variety of different aspirations which, at least for a time, pointed towards common aims. After the insurrections crushed in fire and the acquisition of state independence the Bulgarian people anticipated the war against Turkey as the only means of settling the national question, as a “sacred cause” seeking to liberate the compatriots in Macedonia and the Odrin region. Meanwhile, the two newly emerged military and political groups – the Triple Alliance (Germany, Austro-Hungary and Italy) and the Entente (Britain, France and Russia) – were only on the verge of a world war, so they were hectically seeking allies in the Balkans. Consequently a Balkan Alliance came about under the direct patronage of Russia. It pooled the efforts of the Balkan Christian states against the still strong Turkey, and at the same time served as a strategic tool of the Entente in the struggle against the Triple Alliance for influence in the Peninsula.

The Bulgarian rulers were in a hurry to take advantage of the weakness of the Ottoman Empire after the defeats it had suffered in its war with Italy. In 1912 the Balkan Entente was established, linking Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece and later Montenegro. According to the Bulgarian-Serbian Treaty signed on 29th February



Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg (1861–1948) ruled as a prince from 1887 to 1908 and then as a tsar till 1918.

and aimed against Turkey the future free Macedonia was to be split in two regions (zones). After the anticipated victory over the Ottoman Empire the “indisputable zone” had to become Bulgarian possession. Greece also joined the Bulgarian-Serbian nucleus of the Balkan Alliance. However, the Balkan Alliance proved to be a temporary and unstable military and political union containing the explosive



Cannons from the time of the Balkan and the First World War can be seen in the Museum of Military History in Sofia.

of the unsettled territorial issues. Bulgaria not only undertook the obligation to call to the colors the largest number of soldiers – nearly half a million – but it also assumed the responsibility to wage the war at the most important parts: the Thracian front, where the principal Turkish forces were concentrated.

After in mid October the Allies declared war on Turkey three Bulgarian armies gained a series of brilliant victories in the Odrin region of Thrace. The Serbs and the Greeks also had success in the Macedonian and Albanian lands, and soon the Sublime Porte was pleading for truce. Then King Ferdinand, who was also Commander-in-Chief, committed a strategic error: in his desire to set foot in Constantinople as soon as possible, the monarch hastily ordered an attack against the strongly fortified Turkish

position Chataldja – a mere few kilometers from Constantinople. Unfortunately, the offensive was curbed and now the Turkish government seemed more confident. The London peace negotiations in December failed. Germany then backed the new Turkish government. Once again the outcome of the war had to be decided on the battlefield and in the next months the Bulgarian troops tightened the grip. After prolonged and sanguinary battles they broke the Turkish defense, so Turkey, forced to its knees, finally signed a peace treaty in London on 17th May 1913.

The Allies, however, could not agree on the division of the conquered territory. Even in the autumn of 1912 the Serbian diplomacy commenced secret negotiations with the government in Athens – so Serbia and Greece virtually terminated the Balkan Alliance – on a new partitioning of Macedonia to the disadvantage of Bulgaria. In order to enforce his claims King Ferdinand I violated the Constitution and on 16th June 1913 launched an offensive against the former allies – the Serbian and Greek armies which were occupying Macedonia. In his ambition the Bulgarian king had underestimated the strength of the coalition against him, which was now joined by Romania and Turkey. Now Bulgaria had to fight at four fronts. The step was not only precipitant but historically irresponsible, too, for the army was exhausted after the highly distressful Balkan War. Moreover, Russia backed firmly none of the Bulgarian claims, while it could hardly conceal its nice feelings for Serbia. This second Balkan war, also known as the War of the Allies, ended in the capitulation of Bulgaria.

On 28th July 1913 was signed the Bucharest Peace Treaty which was unjust and misfortunate for Bulgaria: Serbia and Greece divided among themselves the larger



The monument dedicated to the fallen in the wars in front of which official military rituals are often performed on occasion of National holidays.

part of Macedonia with predominantly Bulgarian population and Southern Dobrudja was assessed to Romania. Expressing his indignation the British journalist and James Boucher wrote that the Treaty was “the biggest diplomatic crime of the century”. Thus, for Bulgaria, the Second Balkan War wound up with the drama of the first national catastrophe.

The European war



A monument to the fallen between 1915-18 in the First World War.

Due to the relatively quick recovery of the economy and the army after the War of the Allies the public voices for taking revenge on the former allies were strong. The government of Radoslavov sought support of Germany and Austro-Hungary in case of a new war against Serbia and Greece. The so called Central Powers have already increased their political, economic and cultural influence in the country. But as the global military conflict broke out, it became even more complicated for Bulgaria to make a choice.

In return for Bulgaria's participation in the military action against the Central Powers, the diplomacy of the Entente lavishly promised considerable territories inhabited by Bulgarian population and held by its neighboring countries. Of course, Serbia and Greece immediately expressed their disagreement. Finally, at the end of August 1915 Bulgaria joined the group of the Central Powers by virtue of two agreements with Germany and Turkey which fought on its side. This time the Bulgarian army marched against

Serbia. Then in the summer of 1916 Romania declared war on the Central Powers, the Bulgarian army routed its army, took back South Dobrudja and in the beginning of December Bulgarian and German divisions triumphantly entered Bucharest. But when in the spring of 1918 Bolshevik Russia and Romania went out of the war the Central Powers betrayed the interests of Bulgaria and in September it was compelled to sign the first armistice.

Ferdinand found himself at the head of a mutinous army and a nation on the brink of rebellion so he conceived a change in the government. The leader of the Democratic Party Prime Minister Malinov was liked in Paris and London but it was too late already. In September 1918 the Bulgarian army suffered



The Balkans – ever assumed as the “powder-keg” of Europe...

a defeat by the troops of the Entente in Macedonia. Then Bulgaria had to experience a big humiliation: in Thessaloniki, on 29th September, it was subjected to partial military occupation and forced to disband its army. Now Ferdinand's only chance was to abdicate in favor of his first-born son Boris and he did it on 3rd October 1918. However, the Bulgarians could not expect anything good for their national cause of the forthcoming peace conference. And the latter was confirmed as the Treaty of Neuilly (27th November 1919) deprived Bulgaria of its access to the Aegean. A second national catastrophe was at hand...

**The years shall sweep away false reputations,
The darkness of oblivion shall shroud
The names of men who held the highest stations,
But still my verses shall be read aloud.**

Taken from "To the Future" by Ivan Vazov (1850–1921), translated by Peter Tempest



The monument to "the patriarch" of Bulgarian classical literature Ivan Vazov (1850–1921) in Sofia.

CHAPTER 6

THE RULE OF KING BORIS III "THE INTEGRATOR": 1919–1943 AND THE COUP OF 9TH SEPTEMBER 1944

The Stamboliyski regime

The war caused a drastic crisis in the economic life of Bulgaria that went along with an all-national discontent and indignation against the parties that involved the country into the military conflicts. Strikes, inflation and a ration system helped the left political forces gather strength in no time: in May 1919 was established the Communist party. The leader of the Agrarian Union party, Alexander Stamboliyski (1879–1923) – who had been thrown into prison during the rule of Radoslavov – now formed a new government and was burdened with the task to sign the ominous Treaty of Neuilly. Later, in the spring of 1920, after pre-term elections, the "Agrarians" won a majority in the Parliament and this time Stamboliyski finally headed an independent agrarian government.



The monument of Alexander Stamboliyski in front of the National Opera House in Sofia.

During his "peasant dictatorship" Stamboliyski openly opposed to the young King Boris III. The ambitious reforms and extreme political actions undertook by the Prime Minister caused tension between capitalists and the working class, as well as between the urban and rural population. Part of the intellectuals also disliked the self-confidence and the declared intentions of the agrarian leader to rule with a "firm hand". So the existing pre-war political parties started looking for a way of unification in order to struggle against the agrarian government. New political formations appeared soon and turned into relentless adversaries of Stamboliyski's authoritarian dictatorship.

The "fascist" coup of 1923

On the night of 9th June 1923 the government was overthrown by a coup d'état carried out by the newly formed organizations Military Union and People's Concord. Stamboliyski and other agrarian leaders were killed. Ahead of the new government stood professor Alexander Tsankov and King Boris III recognized his cabinet officially. However, the tension remained despite the efforts of the political forces to restore constitutional order.

After the Communist International was formed up in 1919 and the Bolsheviks – who already ruled Russia for two years – started imposing their idea of a "world revolution" on



Front page of the newspaper "Bulgarski fascist" (Bulgarian Fascist) which came out of print until 1944.

most of the communist parties in Europe, from Moscow was sent to Sofia a directive for a mass uprising. It started in September 1923, led by the Bulgarian Communist Party. Within a short period of time many towns and villages fell in the hands of the rebels who, following the Bolshevik pattern, established there a “workers’-and-peasants’ rule”. But the government troops dealt easily with the rioters and the leaders of the uprising – headed by Georgi Dimitrov – as well as hundreds of their adherents had to flee to Yugoslavia. By virtue of the newly issued “Law on the Protection of the State” the Communist Party was banned.



The Sveta Nedelya Church, a. k. a. Church of the Blessed King, in which on 16th April 1925 took place the bomb attack on Tsar Boris III.

Now the nation was already split in a dramatic way and the spirit of political intolerance, garnished with uncontrolled violence, was instilled for decades to come. Inspired from Moscow, the leaders of the Communist Party perceived terror as a form of political struggle and initiated preparations for a new uprising. They started the “red terror” which reached its climax on 16th April 1925 when hundreds of innocent people in Sofia were either killed or injured by a terrible explosion in the church of St. Sabbath in an abortive attempt on the life of the King and the attending ministers. The Government responded with fierce “white terror” – a period of arrests, torture and executions – which aroused

indignation and the international authority of the government dropped drastically. In the beginning of 1926 professor Tsankov resigned.

The next government of Andrei Lyapchev achieved a relative national reconciliation and restored part of Bulgaria’s international prestige. Meanwhile, the victory of fascism in Italy and the offensive of national-socialism in Germany led to the establishment of several small pro-fascist organizations, the most influential of which was People’s Social Movement, formed by the adherents of Tsankov. Then in time the Great Depression of 1929 made the position of Lyapchev’s cabinet more and more instable. Unemployment and impoverishment evoked social indignation. In the summer of 1931 the newly formed coalition People’s Block led by Alexander Malinov attained a sweeping victory at the parliamentary elections. Despite all well-meaning efforts the government failed to surmount the remnants of the global crisis of the economy.

The “Monarch-Fascist dictatorship”

In the beginning of 1933 Adolf Hitler’s National Socialist German Workers’ party came to power in Germany and the issue of the orientation of Bulgaria’s foreign policy became already a pressing matter. As a matter of fact, the Bulgarian foreign policy – following the example of Germany and Italy – endeavored to revise the post-war borders and so



“Boris III (1894–1943), king of Bulgaria (1918–43), ally of Hitler”, points the Webster’s Encyclopedic Dictionary.

Bulgaria did not join the Balkan Treaty Organization (Yugoslavia, Romania, Greece and Turkey) set up in 1934. Political life in the country entered an ailing phase brought about by the controversies within the Government and the scuffle between the parties.

On the night of 19th May 1934 the officers grouped in the Military Union and a middle-class party called Zveno ("the Link") took advantage of the tense situation and carried out a bloodless coup



The building of the Academy of Sciences of Bulgaria was erected in 1926.

d'état. King Boris III approved the new government, headed by Kimon Georgiev, which disbanded the National Assembly, and then all political parties and public organizations. Now the King himself succeeded to consolidate his position in the Bulgarian politics and become the key figure in governance. Later, some historians called this period a "Monarch-Fascist dictatorship"...

In the summer of 1938 a regime of undivided royal power already triumphed in Bulgaria. King Boris III evoked tender feelings abroad and among the Bulgarian public. The country became more secure and moved closer to the desired peaceful revision of the Treaty of Neuilly which had imposed military limitations. The relations with Yugoslavia and the other neighboring countries were considerably improved. All this went along with some economic and cultural growth.

During the first half of the 20th century Bulgaria used to be an agrarian country and its agriculture was also affected by the global economic depression (1929–1933). The development of the industry was rather slow. The small enterprises of light industry for processing agricultural raw materials predominated. However, except for the mentioned crisis period, in the course of the two decades after the war there was a pronounced growth in the volume of domestic and foreign trade. New private banks were established with the participation of foreign capitals. Railway transport gained in strength due to government lending. In 1927 even were laid the foundations of the national air transport.

Of course, the all-national issues and the tendencies in Bulgaria's historical development between the wars were reflected by its educational system, its culture and the arts. The Bulgarian mass-media developed at relatively high rates. In 1932 commenced its regular broadcasts Radio Sofia. Both the Bulgarian museums and libraries were purposefully sup-



The University of Sofia was built between 1934 and 1944 to the design of the French architect Bréançon.

ported by the municipalities and the state. In the early 1930s was created the first Bulgarian sound film. Bulgarian architecture also made progress during the inter-war decades. A number of works by Bulgarian poets and writers were translated into foreign languages. Step by step the Bulgarian culture was integrated into the cultural life of Europe...

The War: once again a Germany ally



The building in which was housed the German legation during the war; now the main notary's office in Sofia.

prochement with Hitler. The Filov government rejected the Soviet proposal of 25th September 1940 for the conclusion of a pact of non-aggression and mutual assistance between the two countries, and, after Southern Dobrudja was gained back from Romania the same month with the assistance of Germany and the benevolence of the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom, accepted the Vienna Pact which was imposed on it by Hitler on 1st March 1941. Now Boris III was proclaimed for "The Integrator King"...

Hitler's victories enhanced the pro-German sentiments among the Bulgarian ruling top and a part of the public. Moreover, the pressure of Berlin on Sofia became irresistible when Romania and Hungary joined the Axis. A month later and just within a few days the powerful German army crushed the resistance of Greece and Yugoslavia. A Bulgarian administrative and military rule was established over sizable positions of Macedonia and the Aegean Region. But the ultimate destiny of these indigent Bulgarian territories, now termed "the new lands", was to be decided only after the war. So the Bulgarian national question found only a partial and unsatisfactory solution.

Then the Bulgarian ruling crust undertook a rather improvident move declaring war on the USA and Great Britain which later once again brought Bulgaria among the defeated countries. However, withstanding Hitler's pressure, the King and the Government sent no Bulgarian troops to the eastern front after the

The German attack against Poland of 1st September 1939 marked the beginning of World War II. Again a lot of questions were posed before Bulgaria. In February 1940 the German military and diplomatic achievements made King Boris III opt for the pro-German professor of archaeology Bogdan Filov as a Prime-Minister. In the summer of the same year, after a sweeping victory over France, Germany signed the Tripartite Treaty, which gave birth to the "Rome-Berlin-Tokyo axis". The German pressure on Sofia, coupled with threats and new promises for national unification, mounted. The British King, on his part, warned King Boris III to avoid a military and political rap-



Russe: a sculpture to the memory of Elias Canetti (1905–1994), born as a Bulgarian Jew and won the Nobel Prize for literature (1981).

German incursion into the Soviet Union on 22nd June 1941. The Bulgarian society also proved its democratic nature and its extraordinary humanness when in 1943 it made a vigorous stand against the German demand that the Bulgarian Jews should be deported to the concentration camps. King Boris III complied with the opinion of the people and Bulgaria proved to be one of the few countries in the world that defended its Jews (some 50 000 people) in the years of World War II.

During the whole war the unequal trade balance with Germany undermined the Bulgarian economy. By the end of the war the Reich controlled 80 % of the Bulgarian trade and was highly indebted to Bulgaria in financial terms. All the time King Boris III was anxiously persisting against the country's total dependence on Berlin and was seeking unofficial contacts with the Western countries for opting out the war. He never agreed to break off relations with the Soviet Union, and throughout the war there was a Soviet military attaché in Sofia as well as an attaché representing the Third Reich – which constantly irritated Hitler! King Boris III even had secret meetings with Russian diplomats. Nevertheless, the monarch failed to make a gradual turn in the foreign policy and on 28th August 1943 – after a particularly violent argument with the Führer – suddenly died of a heart attack...despite the fact that he used to be a healthy man at the age of 49. So people still wonder: did Gestapo or the Soviet intelligence "help" him die? His death marked the beginning of a profound social and political crisis...

The coup of 9th September 1944

The legal opposition already insisted on a termination of the alliance with Germany and an orientation towards the Western states. Negotiations were led in Istanbul. In the spring of 1944 it established contacts with the Soviet diplomacy, too. Meanwhile, the already organized in 1942 leftist Fatherland Front and the armed resistance headed by it anticipated a radical change with the advancement of the Soviet army towards Bulgaria. Finally, in the summer of 1944 the new cabinet of Ivan Bagryanov made another abortive attempt to orientate the Bulgarian foreign policy towards the United Kingdom and the United States. But it was too late – the Soviet army hovered over the northern Bulgarian border...

On 5th September 1944 the Soviet Union declared a war on Bulgaria and its troops crossed the border. With their decisive assistance the communist led Fatherland Front organized a military and political action aimed at the seizure of power. On 6th September the Government officially entered into a war with the Reich. In the night of 8th September 1944 military units supported by guerilla fighters overthrew the Mouraviev government. In the early morning of 9th September the new Prime-Minister Kimon Georgiev read the declaration of the Fatherland Front Government on the radio.



"The Pantheon" in Varna symbolizes the "struggle against the fascists". Thousands are the monuments of this kind throughout the country – surely more than "the heroes" themselves...

During the years of World War II the authoritarian non-party regime failed to resolve the major domestic problems and after it the Third Bulgarian Kingdom entered a crucial époque...

**In vain shall you further generations
Rummage in books, for you will never quite
Grasp to the full, as we laid the foundations,
How we lived then, just what our life was like!**

Taken from "When the Foundations were Laid" by
Penuy Penev (1930–1959), translated by Peter Tempest



A general view of Lovech – many Communist party functionaries came from this town.

CHAPTER 7

COMMUNIST RULE: 1944–1989

Liberation or occupation?

The alliance with Nazi Germany during the war called forth international isolation for Bulgaria. Despite the fact that from the end of 1944 till May 1945 the Bulgarian army fought on Yugoslav, Hungarian and Austrian territory against the Germans the British Prime-Minister Winston Churchill and the Soviet leader Stalin considered Bulgaria as a defeated country and used it as a means of exchange when determining the zones of influence of the Great Powers on the Balkans. The proportion of 75% for Moscow against 25% for the Western democracies enforced the indisputable Soviet presence in the country. Moreover, upon Bulgaria was dumped the burden of 70 million dollars worth of reparations but the country obtained no compensation for the losses it had incurred during the war. However, all the time the Bulgarian foreign policy was constructive, free from territorial claims and revenge-seeking aspirations with respect to the neighbors...



The Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia – a shaking symbol of submission – was built in 1954.

In violation of the Constitution the Council of Ministers released the previous regents of the minor King Simeon II and appointed a new Council of Regents. Then, at a referendum carried out on 8th September 1946, an overwhelming majority of over 93 per cent voted in favor of a republic and on 15th September Bulgaria was declared as such with the well-known communist leader Vasil Kolarov (1877–1950) elected as its Chairman. The eight-year-old King Simeon II and his family had to leave the country... The new cabinet refused to legalize the other parties accusing them of fascism. At the same time the Communist party expanded and consolidated its ranks around a new Political Bureau chaired by Georgi Dimitrov (1882–1949) – a leader of the international communist movement who had become world-famous as a victor of the Leipzig Trial against the Nazis (1933–1934) and was a former General Secretary of the Communist International. Until the end of the war

After the coup d'état of 9th September 1944 Soviet Russia gradually imposed a new political system in Bulgaria. The three-year presence of the Soviet army in Bulgaria was of decisive importance for the domination of the communists and of their allies in governance. A form of resistance against the occupiers and their local supporters was the partisan anti-communist movement of the Goryani ("men of the forest") whose members were all liquidated physically by the late 50's.



The "chieftain and teacher" of the Bulgarian people Georgi Dimitrov died on 2nd July 1949 and a Mausoleum for his embalmed body was built in 6 days and 6 nights...

Dimitrov guided the party from Moscow with the assistance of the first Secretary of the Central Committee Traicho Kostov (1897–1949).



The monument on Mount Buzludja where on 2nd August 1891 was founded the Bulgarian Social Democratic (later Communist) Party.

Soon an overt political offensive against the legal opposition was initiated and in the summer of 1946 a series of political trials against its leaders were staged. The so-called People's Tribunal passed over 9 thousand sentences, 2730 of them being capital ones. The opposition was brutally crushed and its parties were disbanded by virtue of a special law. In the summer of 1947 Nikola Petkov, the eminent leader of the Agrarian Union, then in opposition, fell victim to the terror. With a special decree were established "labor-educational hostels for politically dangerous persons" which by its nature were concentration camps where thousands of political, public and cultural figures were sent without any legal action. And those camps existed till the early 60's!

The new Constitution passed by the Grand National Assembly in the beginning of December 1947 actually legalized the following steps in the transition to socialism. The same month banks and most private sectors of the national economy were nationalized and large urban property was alienated a few months later. With the decisions adopted by the Fifth Congress of the Communist Party held in December 1948 the process of "communization" went on and gained in depth. In general, the Congress imposed a Soviet model on the country's future development as the activities of the regime were directed and controlled by Stalin and the Soviet leadership.

Till the end of 1948 the Communist Party practically took hold of the key levers of power. A mass and quite often lacking principles ideological "cleansing" of the state administration was carried out under the slogan of "struggle against the fascists". The Orthodox Church, a traditional bastion of the Bulgarian spiritual life, also suffered a severe blow after 9th September 1944: in just a few months were brutally killed thousands of priests, others were sent to concentration camps. The elimination of the religious school education was coupled with strong atheistic propaganda and the place of religion in school was replaced by the Russian language...

The political change of 9th September 1944 led also to the initiation of the so-called "cultural revolution" whose major objective was to impose Marxism-Leninism as a state ideology in all spheres of life. Following the Soviet traditions, the slogan of combating "the pro-fascist ideas" was used to dismiss many teachers and professors and to expel a mass of university students who could hardly be reproached for fascist actions. The totalitarian nature of the state imposed unprecedented censorship and management of all cultural activities through administrative methods and decrees: any means of "western influence" – books, music, movies or fashion – were banned and defined as "ideological diversion". The repressions targeting political opponents affected many men of culture, too, because of their free thinking and quest for intellectual independence.

“When the foundations were laid...”



The Party House, the headquarters of the Central Committee of the Communist Party.

Along with the political changes went a mass cooperation of agriculture, launched at the end of 1948. It was carried out by direct application of physical violence, political persecution and psychological pressure on the farmers. Meanwhile, the communist dictatorship ensured considerable privileges for its party members – in the years to come the institution “active fighter against fascism and capitalism” would also give leverage in the careers to hundredths of thousands of people... But back then, under the influence of Stalin, the upper crust undertook repressions against some of their own brothers-in-arms under the popular Bolshevik slogan of “persecution of the enemy with a party membership card”. The victims were prominent communists, with Traicho Kostov, the ex-First Secretary of the Central Committee, at the head...

In the summer of 1949 Prime-Minister Georgi Dimitrov died in the Soviet Union leaving a contradictory trace in the Bulgarian and world history with his anti-fascist activities. His place was occupied by Vasil Kolarov who also died soon – in February 1950. Prime-Minister and leader of the Communist Party then became Valko Chervenkov (1900–1980) who had spent many years of emigration in the Soviet Union and reached the top due to Stalin’s direct patronage. After he was elected also for a Chairman of the National Council of the Fatherland Front, he ultimately concentrated the entire power in his hands...

Chervenkov ruled from 1949 till 1953, which was the time of the first five-year plan for the development of the national economy, the so-called petiletka. During his period the party and state leader introduced in Bulgaria all typical features of the socialist society molded in the Soviet Union. However, a positive appreciation in those years deserves the initiation of grand construction works – roads, dams, plants, buildings – on a quite large nationwide scale. But in no time Chervenkov elevated his own personality above everything and everybody, thereby introducing the so-called “Stalinist personality cult” on Bulgarian ground...



In the spring of 1990 the red star above was replaced by a national flag.

In 1955 (14th May) was founded the Warsaw Treaty Organization as military and political union of the eight socialist states and as a counterbalance of the already existing North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Now Europe was ultimately split into two hostile groups and during the “cold war” years Bulgaria remained far behind the “iron curtain”...

The époque of Todor Zhivkov



To many the “Comrade Zhivkov” – tenderly referred to as “Daddy” – provided well-being; but at the end those turned out to be ungrateful to “the man of the people”...

After Stalin’s death in 1953 the communist leadership in Bulgaria was compelled to moderate the regime. Todor Zhivkov, by then just a member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist party, grasped the spirit of the new time before any other communist leader. He proved to be the appropriate political figure for the new Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev (1894–1971) who scathingly criticized Stalin’s “personality cult” at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, held in February 1956. After Zhivkov had already attracted Khrushchev’s attention, the ambitious Bulgarian politician started concentrating in his hands the entire party and state power. Seven five-year plans for the development of the national economy (or petiletki) marked the “Zhivkov époque” of the most recent Bulgarian history. Till 10th November 1989 he was to stay unchangeably at the head of the Bulgarian Communist party as a First or General Secretary of its Central Committee. During these several decades nobody was in a position to challenge the absolute undivided power of the party and state leader. Thus Zhivkov would remain at the top as a ruler who had gradually subjected the whole state to his will for not less than thirty-five years...

The Tenth Congress of the BCP held in April 1971 adopted the Program of the Communist party. This document formulated the principal task of the Bulgarian historical development as “building an advanced socialist society”. On 18th May 1971, after a referendum, the National Assembly promulgated the new Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria. Now the utopian communist ideology and the repressive state power had begun to disunite the eastern societies and depersonalized their members...

In the 1970’s the party and state leader’s daughter Lyudmila Zhivkova gradually took over the management of the cultural policy in the country. Possessing some modern views and sharing some occult doctrines – under the motto “Think of me as of fire...” – she made a

considerable contribution to the unchaining of Bulgarian culture, to its “open-

ing” to the global tendencies and ideas. Traveling a lot around the world and organizing many large-scale international events Lyudmila raised the prestige of Bulgarian culture abroad. According to some sources she even had initiated preparation for dethroning her father and shifting the national policy aside from Kremlin. For which she was not liked by the KGB and her sudden death in 1981 might serve as a cause for giving it a thought...



Being rather broad-minded for her time Lyudmila Zhivkova ended as a martyr in the cause of social renovation.



One of the symbols of the “advanced socialist society”: the modern Sports complex in Varna.

By the late 1970's and the early 1980's it became evident that the economic objectives were set at lower levels due to the continuous economic decline. All attempts to carry out technological renovation of industry and to build industrial giants proved difficult, for they entailed enormous international loans. The communist propaganda though never stopped the verbal booming about "real socialism" based on "a new economic approach", "intellectualization of labor and production", "participation in the international labor division", etc. However, the crisis went on...

"What 'perestroika'? We did ours in 1956..."

At this crucial moment of time Zhivkov proved to be at variance with the newly elected – in April 1985 – General Secretary of the Central Committee in the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev (b. 1931). The restructuring ("perestroika") of the existing economic and political system launched by the Soviet leader was not to the liking of Zhivkov. In a speech he declared that Bulgaria had already done its

perestroika back in 1956... And despite that the country was regarded as the most loyal satellite of the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe, this time it tried to disregard the Kremlin directives. In one way or another, Todor Zhivkov played the "restructuring game" by carrying out demonstrative but ineffective transformations.



The National (or formerly "People's") Palace of Culture in Sofia was opened in commemoration of the 1300 anniversary of the Bulgarian state in 1981.

However, as the "perestroika" was launched in the mid of the 1980's, the leading party and state bodies already discussed the possibilities for structural renovation of the Bulgarian economy and for broad economic cooperation with the West-European countries and Japan. The low development level of production and the distortions in the financial sphere would create later the prerequisites for the hard transition to a

market economy. Meanwhile, the properly developing Bulgarian-Turkish relations cooled off considerably after the acts of imposing Bulgarian names on the Bulgarian ethnic Turks in the period 1984–1989.

The internal crisis situation and the example of the Soviet "perestroika" activated the Bulgarian intellectuals who already were divided into "reformers" and followers of the old line. In 1988 and 1989, headed by representatives of the red intellectual elite and with some support from outside, the so-called informal organizations appeared one by one. They protested against reform imitations and insisted on radical transformations. In October 1989 these illegal structures availed themselves of the fact that the World Eco-forum was held in Sofia to make their appearance before the Bulgarian public through rallies, marches and subscriptions.

The palace coup of 10th November 1989

Assisted by the Soviet Embassy, the leadership of the Bulgarian Communist party made preparations for a major shift in their ranks of file. On 10th November 1989 a party plenum released Todor Zhivkov from the position of a General Secretary of the Central Committee.

Now, he felt too old and too weak to fight another strenuous battle for power...

**Look at me – I march on.
Not with the swing and shiver of a victory march,
Not along a route lined solemnly,
Not under a rain of flowers.**

Taken from "In Spite of Everything" by Bogomil Rainov (b. 1919), translated by Roy MacGregor-Hastie



The construction business went with a huge pace in the years after the changes: a new building in Burgas.

CHAPTER 8

THE YEARS OF DEMOCRACY: 1990 AND ON...

Were 45 really enough?

On 10th November 1989 the Communist party leadership undertook a “palace coup” in order to retain its hold on state governance. The change was done under the decisive influence of the Soviet Union. In fact, Todor Zhivkov was replaced as a party leader and President of the State Council by Petar Mladenov, who had studied in the Soviet Union, had occupied the position of a Foreign minister



A change of the guard in front of the newly established institution, the Presidency.

Meanwhile, since 1988 the structures of the Secret Services were busy working on organizing an opposition to prevent its appearance in a natural way. To differ from other East-European countries whose oppositions to the Communist regimes already had some background – like Poland or Czechoslovakia – in Bulgaria the followers of the perestroika were headed and led not by dissidents or anti-communists. Under the slogan “Forty-five years [e. g. from 1944 to 1989] are enough! Time is ours!” representatives of the totalitarian intellectual elite, guided and mentored by their ex-patrons, became front-men of the democratic movement. The communists then replied: “Time might be yours, but the money is ours!” And in a short time the public funds of the state were transferred into the hands of trustworthy to the Party newly fledged businessmen...

On 7th December 1989 sixteen opposition organizations – the former “non-formals” and some of the old pre-war parties which now restarted their activities – set up the Union of the Democratic Forces (UDF) with the “dissident” Zhelyo Zhelev, a Doctor of Philosophical Sciences, as Chairman of its Coordinating Committee. Then mass rallies and other public forms of protest followed until they led to a renovation of the

and had been a member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the BCP for decades... In January 1990 Andrei Loukanov, another Soviet trainee who had also been a minister and representative of the communist top crust, assumed the position of Prime Minister. These two men clearly declared that, first, the Bulgarian “restructuring” – following the example of the Soviet “perestroika” – should consist in transformations and improvements of the existing system and, second, that the renovating process should be carried out under the leadership of the Communist party...



The alleged for dissident Zhelyo Zhelev – yet just another “man of the people”...

leadership of all public and political organizations which had existed prior to 10th November, and most of them changed their names. The general tendency of democratization also affected the Bulgarian Communist party. For propaganda purposes it was renamed to Bulgarian Socialist party (BSP) and amongst its ranks several factions took shape. Then, following the example of the “gentle revolution” in Czechoslovakia, the conception of a “peaceful transition from the totalitarian system onto democracy” was launched.

From January 1990, borrowing the Polish pattern, the “reformed” communist government started a dialogue with the opposition – represented mainly by ex-communists or former functionaries of different totalitarian structures – in the form of a conference named the “round table”. Its ardent debates led to agreement on some important issues: democratization of the state institutions, adoption of a law on the political parties, restoration of private property, human rights guarantees, privatization and the introduction of market economy, etc. As a result the old Zhivkov’s State Council was closed down and Petar Mladenov became Bulgaria’s first President.



Prime Minister Loukanov: fallen victim to his own schemes for a “transition to market economy”...

Despite the expectations of a huge part of the Bulgarian society – mostly in the larger cities – in June 1990 the Bulgarian Socialist party won the elections for a Grand National Assembly, relying on the support of the villages and small towns. Then the mass public discontent in the biggest cities, though not without the pressure of the trade unions, spontaneously led to new forms of protest: rallies, “tent settlements”, strikes, student’s sit-ins... In the stream of dynamic manifestations of political discontent appeared also a political organization of the ethnic Turks – The Rights and Freedoms Movement (RFM) – despite that its future existence as a political

party, however, came at least just a bit into a contradiction with the new Constitution adopted in July 1991... By the fall of 1990 President Petar Mladenov was forced to resign and Zhelyo Zhelev was elected to his position. Now the Prime Minister Loukanov who had meanwhile headed a second Socialist government also resigned at the end of November 1990.

To keep the agreement of a “peaceful transition” concluded at the “round table” the UDF and the BSP had to form a common government. The new cabinet was headed by the “neutral” lawyer Dimitar Popov who, in his efforts to deal with the crisis that occurred during Loukanov’s rule, when being asked how would the plain people survive after the “liberation” of



...and another of the numberless victims of Loukanov’s transition schemes.

prices on 1st February 1991, remained in the most recent history with the wild-cat phrase: "For God's sake, brothers, do not buy!"

In October 1991 the UDF won the parliamentary elections by a hair's breadth and its leader Filip Dimitrov stood ahead of the first "blue" government which from first relied on the support of the Turkish RFM. Despite the great hopes and expectations of the people the consequences were disastrous: totally ruined agriculture, decrease in production, a split and rivalry in all spheres of social life – including the Orthodox Church, worsened international relations... In January 1992 Zhelyo Zhelev was elected for President but, due to the lack of experience, neither he nor the Cabinet succeeded to consolidate the disappointed adherents of the "Blue idea" and overcome their growing indignation. Finally, when in October 1992 the Turkish ethnic party RFM withdrew its parliamentary support on the UDF, the first "blue" government resigned...

"Pyramids, Pharaohs..."



During the early 90's a "commercial fever" affected almost every home and family...

sportsmen were left without means of living, appeared the so called "groupings of force" – semi-criminal organizations working in connection to different business lobbies. Soon the Berov Cabinet lost the support of the Parliament and resigned in October 1994. A provisional government – which was to rule until the extraordinary parliamentary elections – was appointed by President Zhelev. Five years after the "democratic" changes some people already felt nostalgia for the communist past...

In December 1994 the Socialists won a sweeping victory in the parliamentary elections and formed a new government with the young leader Zhan Videnov ahead. During the next two years every endeavor of the Prime-Minister and his cabinet to deal with the most pressing matters proved to be inefficient: inflation rate went up, banks went bankrupt, an acute grain problem occurred, corruption and crime kept on augmenting. There was a real boom in the so-called "financial pyramids" which practically robbed the over-credulous Bulgarian citizens but the govern-

The new government, headed by Prof. Lyuben Berov, an adviser on economics to President Zhelev, was quite fragile and could not cope with the tasks of its time: economic reforms, privatization, corruption, organized crime... In the conditions of a growing social tension the long-expected transition to a market economy was turning more and more into an illusion. Meanwhile, splinter factions sprang up amidst the two big parliamentary groups of the BSP and UDF. As a result of the drastic dismissal in the army and the police force, along with the fact that the state has ceased to support financially sports and lots of



...and sometimes old Bulgarian houses even reminded of set-scenes from a Western movie, don't they?

ment did nothing to protect them against the unscrupulous raging “pharaohs”. Many people lost their last hopes...along with their last savings. Meanwhile, during the Videnov rule the USD/BGL exchange



Prime Minister Ivan Kostov, “The Commander” – trimmed by Loukanov for the role of a Trojan horse in the “period of transition”...

rate went from 50 (in the fall of 1994) to 3 000 (in January 1997) leva per dollar. By the end of 1996 the general economic and financial situation in the country deteriorated drastically. On 2nd October the “architect” of the perestroika, ex-Prime-Minister Loukanov, was brutally shot by Russian killers in front of his home. As Videnov declared his intention to resign the new leader of UDF Ivan Kostov consolidated his organization, the opposition rejoined and finally the “blue” candidate Petar Stoyanov won the presidential elections in November 1996. Now the only hope left was to start at once negotiations with the international financial institutions on the introduction of a currency board as the only means of rescuing the country...

The new year of 1997 was met with improvised barricades in the streets, mass protest and rallies of indignation against the “red” government. It took some time for the Socialists to stomach the idea that nothing more could be done on their side. Power was irretrievably slipping under their feet...

“Who does not jump is “red”!”

The street protest culminated in political processions organized on a daily basis with the active participation of university students from the capital city. As temperatures went substantially below zero the young people were compelled to jump in one place to warm themselves and they did it shouting: “Who doesn’t jump is “red”!” On the night of 11th January some extremists burst into the Parliament building shattering doors and windows. Later, a rumor went on that all these protest actions were manipulated and financed from abroad... Finally the ruling BSP had to give in so as to avoid bloodshed and its leadership accepted the demand of the UDF for pre-term elections. On 4th February 1997 the Socialists returned the mandate for the formation of a consecutive government to the President Petar Stoyanov. The Parliament was dissolved and a provisional cabinet was empowered to start negotiations and conclude agreements with the international financial institutions.

The provisional government was headed by the “blue” mayor of Sofia Stefan Sofianski and with some quick measures it managed to make the financial situation relatively stabile, and to introduce the currency board. The newly formed Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) had a crushing defeat against the Socialists in the elections on 19th April 1997 winning an absolute parliamentary majority, and a month later its leader Ivan Kostov headed the new “blue” government which enjoyed a support of broad social basis. Now the hardest tasks before the cabinet were the conducting of the long-awaited necessary reforms.



The new Grand Hotel Sofia replaced the famous old building of Sofia’s City Library.

During the years of his rule (1997–2001) the “Commander” – as Prime-Minister Kostov was referred to with affection by his supporters – did his best to restore the country after the devastating effect of Videnov’s cabinet. His foreign policy facilitated the Bulgarian membership in the International Monetary Fund and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. The country gradually adopted a policy of political and economic orientation to the West and, in particular, to the USA. At the same time the home market was flooded with goods of suspicious quality, mostly imported from the Far and Near East...



A weekday view of the “Marie-Louise Boulevard” in the center of Sofia.

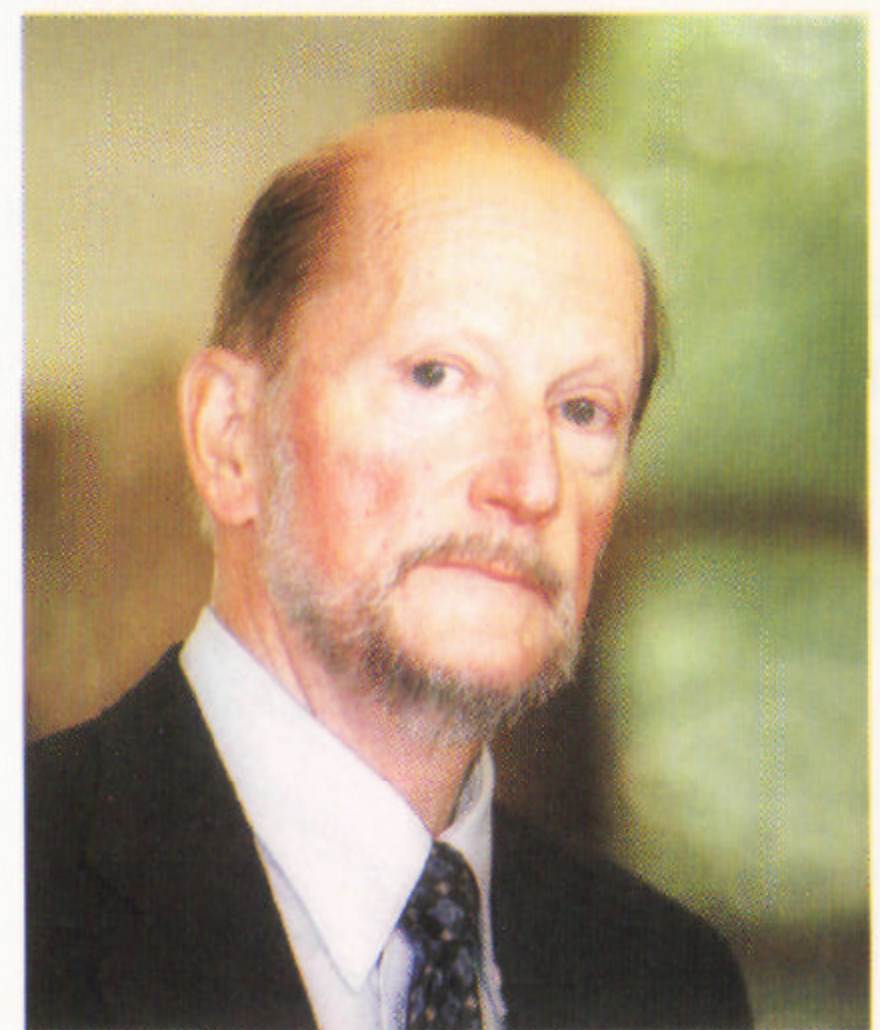
among his former supporters and some main political figures started to leave the “Blue Alliance” to form diverse organizations and parties of their own. By the year 2000 a significant part of those who had voted for the ADF in 1997 – representatives of small and medium-sized private businesses – were already expecting a change...

Then on the Bulgarian political scene appeared the figure of King Simeon II, brought from the Spanish capital Madrid with the help of Kremlin, and led by their emotions, as well as by their sympathy towards the monarch institution of his father, King Boris III, the majority of the Bulgarian society turned their eyes in a new direction...

The “Fourth Bulgarian Kingdom” or “I’ll get you fixed in 800 days!”

How successful was Ivan Kostov as a Prime-Minister became clear at the elections of June 2001. Lured on the promises of a better and prosperous life given by Simeon II – like a 5 000 leva loan per capita with no interest, the famous boast of the “800 days” in which he would “get people fixed”, along with the assumed obligation for “integrity in everything” – the average Bulgarian gave in return his vote in favour of the newly

The reformation of the financial system in 1997–1999 reflected like a tornado on small business and that broadened the basis for the so-called “grey economy”. Soon the latter predominated and the plain people, as their incomes decreased, began to look for means of avoiding payments of social security or any other financial obligations towards the state which in a couple of years had augmented in times. The relations between the official institutions and agencies with criminal economic structures and groups became quite obvious. Prime-Minister Kostov’s will to control personally all levels and spheres of economic life brought discontent even



The former King who left Madrid to become a Prime Minister in the name of the well-being of the Bulgarians...

formed by the ex-monarch party, named after him: the Simeon II National Movement. Moreover, the discontent of Kostov's "blue" government in November 2001 led to the electing of a "red" president – the former leader of the Socialists Georgi Parvanov – despite the expectations and the confidence of Petar Stoyanov to be re-elected. Now the country already had an ex-King for Prime-Minister and an ex-communist for President...

During the four year period of Simeon of Saxe-Coburg Gotha's rule (2001–2005) Bulgaria saw the highest prices of commodities and services ever. Very few become very rich as the standards of life of a huge majority dropped drastically. The salaries in Bulgaria are on the lowest level in whole Europe and more than 2 billion leva enter the country annually sent from Bulgarians who work abroad. However, the country became a member of the NATO (April 2004) and that gave way to a new wave of promises on the side of the ruling top crust. The next target was the European Union membership. This time the promises went beyond everyone's expectations...

The "European dream": old needs, new hopes...



The flags of the NATO and of most of the European Union countries are already hung high in anticipation...

In the spring of 2005 the ruling crust in Bulgaria – consisting to a larger extent of former functionaries of the Communist party, their close relatives or people who have to do in one way or another with Zhivkov's regime – are in shuddering anticipation of the forthcoming parliamentary elections. After a number of processes concerning the "democratization" of society and establishing of "market economy" are already concluded, as a result to which over 80 percent of the funds in the state budget pass through firms that are under control of ministers, deputies and other high dignitaries, all that is left is the country to be accepted as a member of the European Union.

The plain people, on the other hand, whose number is also over 80 percent of the population put before themselves the question: will their old needs be satisfied when the countries of "Old Europe" finally look at Bulgaria benevolently and let her go along with them? As their old hopes already worth too little they have nothing left but to cherish new ones...

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* on the front page: *The cathedral St. Paraskeva and the entrance to the office of its dean, Father Nikolai.*

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